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CONTENTS

ISSUE 52 SEPTEMBER 2000

FEATURES



24 RETURN OF THE RPG

Meet Black Isle Studios, the new dungeon masters of roleplaying. Plus, a sneak peek at Baldur's Gate 2.



46 INTERGALACTIC!

State of Play returns with a look at where space sims are heading in the future.



66 DOWNFALL OF A DEVELOPER

The life of an independent games developer is full of risk, and where success is measured in terms of how long you last.

NEWS

8 Spotlight

Gaming news from all quarters of the globe: Doom III announced, Bungie and Looking Glass exit the PC, and Core's post-Lara adventure.

14 Net Game News

The latest online occurrences: Black & White gathers speed, Ultima Online 2 get a new name, and the best Thief sites on the web.

22 Comment

PCPP has its say on the month's news events.

23 Charts

Australia's best-selling games.

PREVIEWS

30 Giants: Citizen Kabuto

Planet Moon's trippy action game drops by to gobble some sheep.

34 Startopia

Manage a giant, space donut? Sure!

38 Crimson Skies

A game to satisfy all your stunt pilot fantasies.

42 New Shots

Warcraft III, Grand Prix 3 and more.

REVIEWS

68 Review Contents

72 Sydney 2000

COMPETITIONS

125 Win a Voodoo5! Thanks to the kind people at Innovision!



78 Ground Control

82 Vampire:

The Masquerade

86 Icewind Dale

88 Daikatana

90 MDK 2

92 Alien Nations

92 King of Dragon Pass

93 Maximum Flight

93 NFS Porsche 2000

95 Reader Review

96 The Score List

98 Retroversion

TECH

104 Next-Gen Chipsets

How do the GeForce2 and Voodoo5 shape up?

106 The Gaming OS

We benchmark Win2000 and WindowsME for gamers.

108 Hotware

Hardware and peripherals, are at your service.

112 Setup

Dr Dan pulls out the screwdriver.

THE OTHER BITS

116 CD Guide

122 Letters

126 Diversions

130 Next Month

SUBSCRIBE

96 Save up to 40% off your favourite magazine! And win a Mattel games pack while you're at it!



THE BEST



72 Sydney 2000

THE PCPP

TOP

100

These really are GAMES OF ALL TIME!

Quake 3? The Sims? Thief? Age of Kings? Half-Life?
Turn to p50 to find out where your favourite game finished...



EDITORIAL



Hello and welcome to the September issue of PC PowerPlay. It may still be July, but we're not the most forward thinking

PC games magazine in the world for nothing you know. If you've already seen our Olympic Challenge on p76, I just want to say this: the other guys were all drugged up to the eyeballs.

There was a genuine changing of the guard at the office this month. Not only has Sarah, our lovely receptionist, exited to pursue her graphic design dreams, but Malcolm the Art Director has left as well. More than anybody else, Malcolm has been the man responsible for making PCPP what it is today. When he told us he was heading down the other end of the office to launch a brand new PC mag, we could only think, what would we do without him?

Well, no one's irreplaceable, so we hired someone else. Chantal takes over the reins as of this month - her talents will be immediately obvious in the design changes witnessed throughout the following pages. To ensure Malky's spirit lives on, we've introduced the Malcolm Campbell Memorial Monkey (with thanks to the reader who suggested this - you know who you are). See if you can find it...

You may have noticed the absence of a Diablo II review, despite its presence on the shelves of your local games store. As I write this, the game has been officially declared finished for a couple of weeks, yet neither Blizzard nor its publisher, Havas Interactive, have been willing to pass on the final code to the world's press for security reasons. I can't even begin to tell you how frustrating this is for all of us. Fortunately, this sort of thing is the exception; Blizzard is one of only a few developers in the enviably comfortable position to do it. We'll have our review next issue, so in the meantime take any "exclusives" elsewhere with a grain of salt.

Oh, and after you've perused our Top 100 on p50, please send all hate mail to the usual address.

DAVID WILDGOOSE
EDITOR
david@next.com.au



Spotlight

GAME NEWS AND VIEWS

Doom III

ID COME FULL CIRCLE - THE **IMPS FROM HELL** ARE BACK



THE ID ANTHOLOGY

- Commander Keen 2
- Commander Keen 3
- Castle Wolfenstein, 1992
- Doom, 1993
- Doom II, 1994
- Quake, 1996
- Quake II, 1997
- Quake III Arena, 1999
- Quake III Team Arena, 2000



Ending months of speculation, **John**

Carmack - lead programmer and acclaimed gaming god at id Software - announced id's next work in progress: DOOM III (working title only). A follow-up to the firstperson shooter which

put id Software into games history, Carmack had precious little to say about the project, as seen in his .plan file: "We are working on a new DOOM game, focusing on the single player game experience, and using brand new technology in almost every aspect of it."

"We expect to once again dramatically advance firstperson gaming both technically and artistically with this title. Other than that, id does not plan on issuing additional comments until the game is ready to speak for itself," added id's CEO, **Todd Hollenshead**. No time reference has been given in regards to when this may be.

However, the announcement wasn't free from controversy, with reports that the decision to make DOOM III wasn't arrived at with great ease. In Carmack's .plan update, he also revealed that Paul Steed, id's flamboyant and enigmatic artist - had been fired as a result of the decision to do DOOM III. According to .plan update, Steed was fired "in retaliation" to an ultimatum issued by Carmack in regards to the development of a DOOM game: "We are working on DOOM for the next project unless you fire us." Apparently, opinion had been previously heavily divided within the id camp over their future direction.

Kevin Cloud had the following to say about the departure: "Paul was not fired as a result of his support for DOOM. Other people at id supported DOOM in the exact same manner. For several reasons it was time to for id Software and Paul Steed to part company."

The announcement of Steed's close in tenure came, eerily enough, exactly a year after Brian Hook announced his departure from id to join Verant Interactive, makers of EverQuest. Steed's forced hiatus wasn't a lengthy one, however, with the news a week later that Steed had joined fellow ex-id'ster American McGee on Alice as a contracted artist.





No Halo for PC?

QUESTIONS ARE RAISED AS MICROSOFT MOVES TO PURCHASE BUNGIE

It started simply enough - acquisitions of smaller developers by larger publishers are common these days. So when Microsoft bought Bungie Software (developers of the Myth series, currently working on Oni and the stunning Halo), it didn't come as much of a surprise. Under the deal, Take 2 still has publishing rights to the Myth series and will publish Oni, whilst Microsoft has publishing control of Halo and future Bungie releases.

It was at around the same time, however, that Bungie announced Halo - the gorgeous looking multiplayer action game that has whipped the action gaming

community into a frenzy - was coming to the X-Box. More significantly, it was further revealed that no decision had been reached regarding Halo's appearance on any format. That is, the future of the PC version of Halo is at present uncertain.

Bungie was quick to respond to the uproar that ensued, in particular the allegations that the recent purchase by Microsoft influenced the decision to focus Halo's development on the X-Box platform. According to their public relations manager, Bungie is committed to developing for what they deem to be the most appropriate format. Although Bungie hasn't yet decided whether or not Halo will be ported to the PC, they won't as yet rule out the possibility either.



Swallowed by Shadows

THE DEMISE OF LOOKING GLASS STUDIOS

A moment of silence please. No, that's not long enough. Right, now... Looking Glass Studios has hung up the blackjack and closed its doors for good. After releasing a lengthy catalogue of critically acclaimed games (including Ultima Underworld I & II, System Shock 1 & 2, Thief I & II, Terra Nova and the Flight Unlimited series), the funding for the independent games developer simply ran out, forcing closure.

Looking Glass was secretly working on Thief 2 Gold, and Thief 3 at the time. "We were going to do this whole cool open-ended, self-directed city thing, where you get to wander around the city and steal at your leisure, until, of course, Garrett gets mixed up in crazy affairs that draw him into a larger plot... And, yes, it was gonna be about the Keepers," said the now former LG employee Randy Smith of Thief 3. Both projects have been indefinitely suspended.

Still, the support for this roguish collection of developers proved strong even after LG's demise. Ken Levine opened the doors to Irrational Games (developers of System Shock II and co-conspirators with LG), employing a number of ex-



LG employees. All indications suggest that the rest will be similarly absorbed by the development community.

Long live Looking Glass Studios.

For our special feature on LG, turn to p66. And don't forget the hankies.

RIPLEY VS ARNIE 2!

It's been rumoured that Fox Interactive has begun work on a sequel to last year's Aliens Vs Predator. Little is known at this stage save that Fox intends to use the Lithtech 2 engine, and that Rebellion - developer of the original AvP - may not be spearheading development.

GOOD GOD!

The sixth in Impressions' acclaimed series that has no name but has featured Caesar, Pharaoh and their numerous iterations has been unveiled. Zeus will offer more than just a Mediterranean tile set by introducing a narrative structure to the game's strategy core and greater interaction with the various gods of Greek mythology.



FIRST LOOK!

Project Eden

THERE'S MORE TO LIFE THAN RAIDING TOMBS

Core Design has announced a new game. Which is not so surprising in itself. What may come as a shock - and, believe us, we were a little alarmed (but in a good way, of course) - is that it is not another chapter in the Tomb Raider saga. That's on its way, inevitably, in time for Santa at the end of the year, but after that they've got a much more interesting title in development.

Project Eden is an action/adventure set in a suitably grim future world that's a kind of techno Dark City - all towering, faceless skyscrapers and



dank fog as far as the eye can see. The central premise concerns an omnipotent, sinister corporation (there's always one, isn't there?) who have been messing around with genetic manipulation to rather murderous effect. The player takes control of a squad of four compatible heroes whose task it is to nip such dastardly plans in the bud. The game is essentially action-based, but with a supposedly strong narrative. Key to success will be how well you exploit the distinctive characteristics of your four characters; there's the team leader, the tough guy, the hacker and the engineer.

Currently pencilled in for release mid next year, Project Eden could go a long way to dispelling the myth that Lara is all that Core knows.



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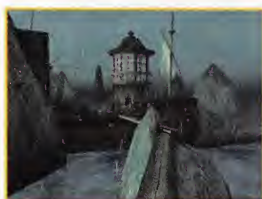
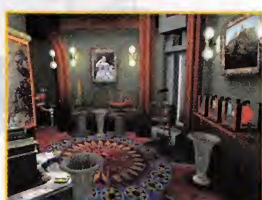
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CAR0315PC

FIRST LOOK!



Before *Myst III Exile* arrives, Mattel will present us with a remake of the original *Myst* - this time using a realtime 3D graphics engine.

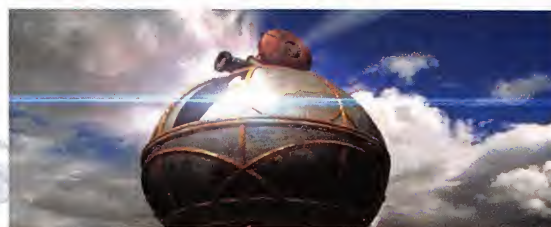
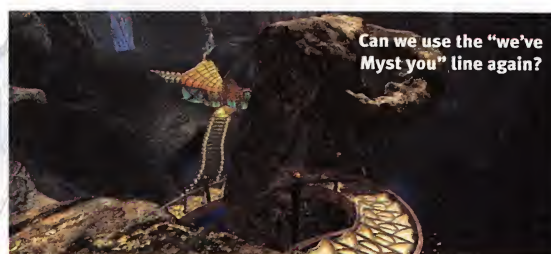
Myst III: Exile

NEW AGE GAMING FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

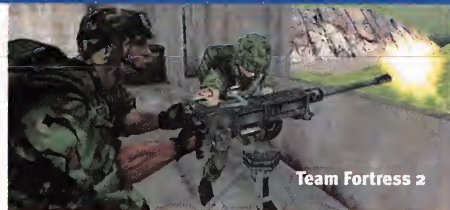
Mattel Interactive has announced the next chapter in the book of *Myst*. Entitled *Exile*, *Myst III* continues the story of Atrus and his family as they once more prepare to save the world from some really bad stuff - apocalyptic, no doubt. The intriguing new feature of this third iteration is the use of a new graphics engine. Gone are the old static screens, with each scene now viewable through a full 360 degrees. Transitions between scenes will also flow far more smoothly than before.

One of the reasons for this change is surely the fact that it isn't being developed by Cyan, the creator of both *Myst* and *Riven*. Instead, Presto Studios (responsible for The Journeyman Project series of adventures) has been tasked with bringing *Myst* to life once more.

Gentle gamers will be able to take a serene walk through plenty of gorgeous scenery early next year.



AUSTRALIA'S MOST WANTED



Team Fortress 2

The beta test clearly whetted plenty of appetites for Blizzard's "dungeon romp", with *Diablo 2* easily becoming this month's Most Wanted game. The release of *Deus Ex* scuppered its strong chance of dislodging *Team Fortress 2* from second place, leaving

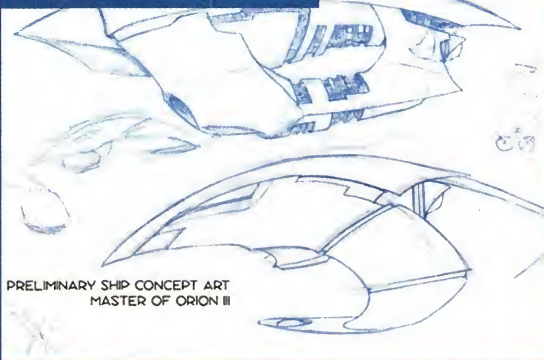
Valve's teamplay shooter comfortably ahead of Duke. At the bottom, there is a return for *Freelancer* and a debut for *Oni*. With two games each in the chart, Blizzard and Bungie seem to be your favourite developers. And for all those who voted *Baldur's Gate 2* into 7th, we've got a nice surprise for you next issue... Send your Top Five Most Wanted Games to:

wanted@pcpowerplay.next.com.au

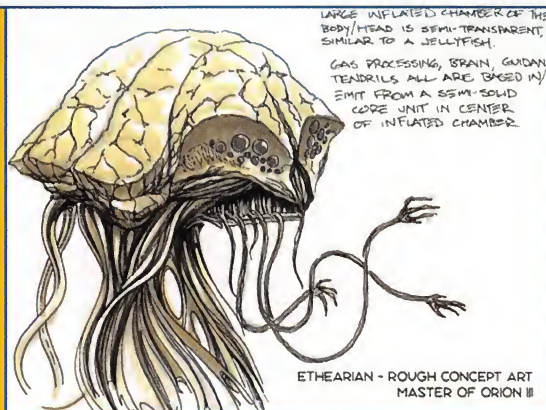
This month's winner, **Hayden King from Lismore, NSW**, will be playing *Team Fortress 2* at some stage next year. Sorry, but no one really knows when it will be released!

1	DIABLO 2	◀
2	Team Fortress 2	◀
3	Duke Nukem Forever	◀
4	Warcraft 3	◀
5	Grand Prix 3	◀
6	Black & White	◀
7	Baldur's Gate 2	◀
8	Halo	◀
9	Freelancer	◀
10	Oni	◀

FIRST LOOK!



PRELIMINARY SHIP CONCEPT ART
MASTER OF ORION III



ETHEARIAN - ROUGH CONCEPT ART
MASTER OF ORION III

TF2 UPDATE



And you were wondering what was taking so long? Valve Software recently revealed that for some months now they had been working on an entirely new game engine for the follow up to Team Fortress. The reason: the internally developed engine will allow them to do plenty more than was previously possible with the highly modified Quake engine. The result: look for TF2 sometime next year.



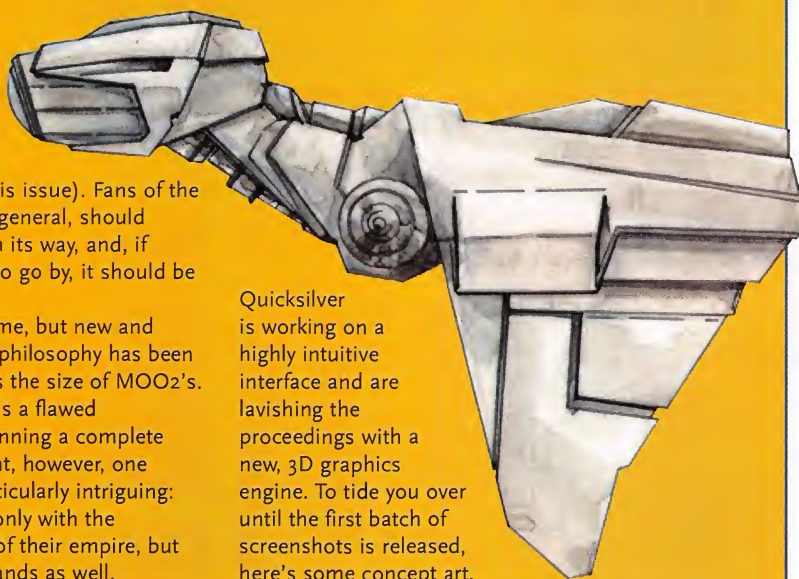
Master of Orion III

MOO TREKS BACK
FROM DEEP SPACE

Master of Orion II is oft regarded as the most rewarding (and addictive) space-based strategy game of all time (snagging 18th in our Top 100 this issue). Fans of the series, and of strategy games in general, should rejoice - Master of Orion III is on its way, and, if design aspirations are anything to go by, it should be bloody enormous.

The expected "more of the same, but new and different, with a lot more depth" philosophy has been adopted in a universe three times the size of MOO2's. Quicksilver is aware that MOO2 is a flawed masterpiece, though, and are planning a complete overhaul. Of the new and different, however, one particular feature has proven particularly intriguing: players will have to contend not only with the economic and military concerns of their empire, but with the social and political demands as well.

Quicksilver is working on a highly intuitive interface and are lavishing the proceedings with a new, 3D graphics engine. To tide you over until the first batch of screenshots is released, here's some concept art.



Consolidating Arts

EA ANNOUNCES ITS NEW, BIG, HAPPY GAMES FAMILY

Bullfrog, Origin Systems, Westwood, Maxis. Take a long hard look at these names and commit them to memory - for these well-established, highly regarded development studios are to be no more. In name, at least.

Electronic Arts - publisher and owner company of the makers of such classics as Sim City, the Ultima Series and the Command & Conquer series - has announced a new branding strategy that'll see future EA releases published under one of three new EA divisions: EA Sports, EA Games and EA.COM.

• **EA SPORTS** will be business as usual, receiving an updated logo.

• **EA GAMES** will encompass all of EA's games (including titles such as the up and coming World is Not Enough, Red Alert 2, SimsVille, etc), excepting sports and online games. EA Games will also get a new logo similar in style to EA SPORTS.



• **EA.COM** will cover EA's online only games, including Ultima Worlds Online: Origin (previous working title being Ultima Online 2) and range of unannounced online games.

So what does all this mean for we, the gaming public? Apart from a few name changes, not much, really. The EA-managed studios that we know and love are still in business, developing said games. But in future, when we go to the store and purchase their latest title, we'll get EA's new branding images instead of the familiar name and logo on the box.

Electronic Arts claims that this new strategy will inform consumers that its "games are developed by the same teams with the same integrity and attention to quality and detail." EA also plans to introduce unified and consistent menu and interface screens across their games to make them more accessible.



The forthcoming **Ultima Worlds Online: Origin** is one of the first titles to bear EA's new branding system.

P16 Origin



P18 Thief II



P21

Sims Online



Net Game News

ONLINE NEWS AND VIEWS



The World is Black & White

PETER MOLYNEUX'S PLANS TO REVOLUTIONISE ONLINE GAMING

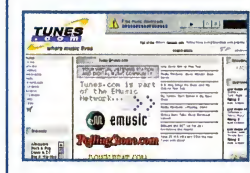


A peaceful village - just ripe for the terrorising.

SHAKE IT BABY

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If you're playing a CD or mp3 on your PC while you play Black & White then the game will log on to Tunes and seek out information on the particular artist you're listening to. It will then let your creature know what type of music is playing. Soon after, your creature starts tapping its foot to the music and learns to dance in perfect time.



When one thinks of online gaming, prevailing wisdom tends to be limited to the adrenalin rush of a firstperson shooter deathmatch or the tank rush of a realtime strategy skirmish. The more adventurous mind - the cable-equipped hardcore gamer, for instance - might envisage the kinetic teamplay of Unreal Tournament's Assault mode or Counterstrike for Half-Life, while some hardy souls would prefer still a descent into the depths of Britannia's Dungeon Destard.

Acclaimed game designer **Peter Molyneux's** imagination has always worked on a different plane to the rest of the industry. As such, his vision of the future of online gaming is somewhat unique. In Black & White, he describes, "Creatures can become friends. Indeed, they can even fall in love. I've seen creatures walking hand-in-hand, and I promise you I've seen couples sitting on the side of a hill watching the sun going down."

Artificial Friends

With the increasingly remarkable Black & White, Molyneux is unleashing his singular talent in startling new directions. Already, the singleplayer game takes many elements from the typical "god-sim" (which he invented with Populous in 1989) and merges them with

an artificial life simulation of staggering complexity. The player is invited to assume the role of God with all the powers of the heavens at His (or Her) fingertips. You can literally pick up people and order them to do your bidding or crush them in your palm. The AI creature (whether it be an ape, cow, tiger, turtle, wolf or any of a dozen others) acts as your earthly presence - indeed, proof enough to your people that God exists. It's this creature that forms the central platform of Black & White's online ambition.

The first step is called Black & White: The Gathering. Initially a demo of the full game, The Gathering will be available before the final game is released. It will link up to ICQ and allow you to adopt a creature in a scaled



CREATURE COMFORTS

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After you've had your creature for an hour, it develops this overwhelming urge to build a website. It will construct a site with pictures of its best friend and its worst enemy, as well as the things it likes and hates. If you put that online, it will even maintain it for you.



Keep an eye on Lionhead's own site for more information once the game is released in (hopefully) September.

down version of the Black & White game world. At a basic level, it's like a fancy chat program, with the player and his friends represented by their respective creatures. But on top of that, all the complex AI workings of the full game will be on display. You can train and interact with your creature as you would in the full version - the only difference being that until you purchase Black & White, you cannot keep your creature after you log off.

Molyneux is clearly excited about the potential of The Gathering: "You can take your creature out of the single player story, go online and meet other people's creatures - chat with them, fight them, learn from them - then you can go back to the story and continue playing. Your creature might catch a cold off another creature; he might get fleas off other creatures. I wanted the creature to constantly surprise the player."

"When you go online," he continues, "if you go meet one of your friends your creature will rush over to their creature and give them a hug or maybe even a kiss. It's really, really cute. But the other side of the coin is the creatures might not get on. When they don't get on, there's a chance they might start to fight."

Kung Fu Cows

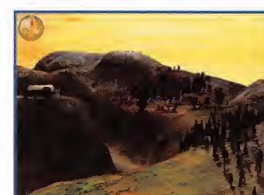
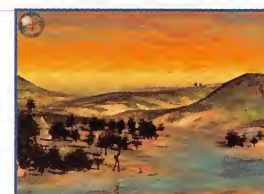
Combat in Black & White is utterly hilarious - and in all probability the most entertaining and downright ridiculous sight I've witnessed in two decades of playing videogames. The actual mechanics are unusual enough: your creature will learn from experience how to fend for itself, but you can lend a guiding hand by clicking on various parts of its opponents body to instruct attacks in that direction. But the real fun comes from the astounding animation. One look at a giant ape adopting a Queensbury stance or, of course, a bipedal cow performing a roundhouse kick to the head of an oversized turtle and I guarantee a visit to the zoo will never be quite the same again.

But the fighting has another aspect to it, one that, as Molyneux explains, furthers the connection not only between the player and his creature, but with fellow players as well. "When you see this other creature that's covered in cuts and scars, you know exactly what that creature's been involved in," he says. "Also, it means that every single person's creature will not only have a unique personality, but also be totally visually unique as well."

Players will also be able to express themselves in the more traditional multiplayer modes on offer. Although the future of one - Black & White Universe (a genuinely massively multiplayer, persistent environment) - remains up in the air, Black & White World should on its own satisfy most players' bids for strategic dominance. Supporting up to eight players, this latter mode pits the player against seven other rival gods each competing for the piety of the land's populace and ultimately control of the world.

Thanks to its several distinctive modes of play, whether it be hurling fireballs across the countryside, kung fu kicking an enemy or simply nattering away with your friend's pet lion, Black & White will provide an online experience quite like no other. Time to throw out the old rules, methinks.

David Wildgoose

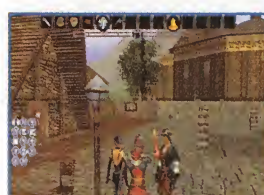


NGN TOP 5 ONLINE GAMES

1. Unreal Tournament
2. Counterstrike
3. Quake III Arena
4. Ultima Online
5. Asheron's Call

Send your votes to ngn@pcpowerplay.next.com.au

Rank: 2/6
Spread: -1



Ultima Worlds Online: Origin

THE GAME FORMERLY KNOWN AS ULTIMA ONLINE 2 MARKS THE NEXT GENERATION OF MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ROLEPLAYING

www.uo2.com

So it was the event known as E3 2000 that Origin chose to unveil the sequel to its massively multiplayer online roleplaying game (MMORPGs as they're affectionately referred to), Ultima Online. And what an unveiling it was. Corrrr blimey! We were first taken aback by the polished state of the game. With only a handful of basic screenshots available prior to the show, we were expecting only a simplistic verbal overview of what UO2 would be when it shipped in donkeys years. Instead, we had real, live code with real, live characters to poke around with. More importantly, with network code in, Starr Long (Producer) and Jeff Anderson (Creative Director) demonstrated the game with fellow employees back in Austin, Texas, providing the multiplayer quotient. But the real surprise wasn't the progress (Origin has been sitting tight on any real substantial game information). Rather, it was just how damn good it looked that knocked our socks off.

Ultima reborn

Ultima Worlds Online: Origin (as UO2 is now known) represents a new age for the Ultima series. It's the first new Ultima game since the conclusion of the series (ending with the ill-fated Ultima IX: Ascension), and a lot is riding on its release. Is Ultima relevant to gamers any more? If the 180,000-plus subscription base to Ultima Online is anything to go by, sure it is. Admittedly though, the well known collection of RPGs - spanning an impressively long history - is showing signs of age and has become a little, well, stale. And although Ultima Online - with its unique persistent multiplayer dynamic - gave the series a much-needed

fresh insight into the world, in hindsight it seems more of a mere collection of all previous games in terms of style and content. Love or loathe Ultima, it's just a bit too familiar now, isn't it?

Not so with UWO: Origin. The development team understands the importance of the Ultima name and legacy, but also believes that the series needs a fresh new direction. They want players to travel their next virtual land and constantly exclaim "Whathefudge? What the hell is that?" They want players to be excited with the new, with the unknown. They want players to feel like exploring new lands, populating never-before-touched frontiers. And judging from that responses of fellow demo-attendees - exactly "Whathefudge?" - Origin's development team will surely succeed in giving us this new experience.

Past, present, future

Origin will be set in Britannia, Logosia and Avenosh. But here's the trick: they each represent different time periods and cultural styles. Avenosh is the land of the Meer - a cat-like species of people leading a very organic and natural life - and represents the past. Britannia - the present - is the well-known pseudo-medieval fantasy element of the Ultima series, and is populated by humans. Logosia represents the future, and is a land of steam-punk technology. The Juka reside in Logosia, under the auspicious rule of a mechanically enhanced Overlord known as Blackthorn. After a great cataclysm, the three worlds were joined as one, allowing easy passage between the three lands.

Players will come into the world 200 years after the great cataclysm, and will be given the choice to play as either the Meer, the Humans or the Juka. More importantly, players will also be able to choose their starting location - each land will feature a different political system, different cultural activities and societies, and ultimately - style of play.

Once within the Origin play world, the first thing that hits you is how gorgeous it looks. It's colourful, vibrant, and highly detailed. Origin makes use of motion-captured characters, which give the game's inhabitants a healthy helping of character. Heck - they even dance and gesticulate all manner of things at the player's request. However, it's not just eye-candy Origin had in mind in implementing the system - the combat system allows for a stunning array of physical moves (more than fifty, all motion-captured) to be used. Expect combat to be *that* much more spectacular.

Enlisting the help of legendary comic artist and toy maker Todd McFarlane, Origin's development team has also created a whole bunch of new monsters to feature in the game. Classics will be included - like the dragon - albeit in updated form: Origin's proprietary 3D engine allows for a true sense of scale to be created. And in regards to the new: a more horrible and twisted collection of freakish creatures we never did see. To use Dorothy's timeless words: "We're not in Kansas any more, Toto."

'TIS BUT A SCRATCH ORIGIN AND THE HERE-AFTER

Death in multiplayer games proves to be a contentious issue. If death is nothing to fear, then players lack the opportunity to experience the honour in protecting life (or the thrill in taking it). Death should be something that instills a passion in players, all in the name of a rich roleplaying (not to forget a rich gaming) experience. UWO: Origin won't feature permanent death, neither will it be avoidable (unless you stay in the safe lands your entire virtual life). So when you die, you can be resurrected at a preselected location - thus avoiding the dreaded "multi-death-curse" where player-killers loiter around your recently felled corpse and continually hack into your weakened form after every resurrect). Certain items can also be "blessed", so that they stay with you through death and out of looters hands (although this may involve an expensive and intricate process). Still, die enough times and you'll take a massive skill and experience point hit. The twist: rather than an automatic deduction to your current stats (as seen in UO), players will have to work off an "experience" debt before their player can continue to develop. Ouch.



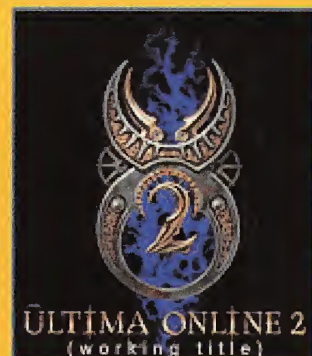
Beasties

Clockwise from top left: the Head Hunter; the Ettin; and a pair of dragons.

Co-designed by Todd McFarlane - comic artist and creator of the Spawn series - Origin's critters are a far cry from the traditional RPG bestiary. Of particular note is their scale: these buggers dwarf the player characters.

What's in a name?

UO2 has in fact only been the project's working title since Origin began development more than 18 months ago. In light of the recent changes at EA - Origin's parent company and publisher - the game's developer will no longer be "obvious" to the public, with "UO2" being marketed as an "EA.COM" game (see p13 for more details). So to keep the Origin name alive and kicking, Ultima Online 2 has been dubbed - ta-da! - Ultima



Worlds Online: Origin. So UWO: Origin is the name of the game, and is still being developed by the Origin development studio - the same guys responsible for Ultima Online - of the EA.COM division. That's not very confusing at all, is it?

Endearing

Naturally, Origin will allow players to lead alternate virtual lives doing all manner of things that we've come to know and love in the massively multiplayer online RPG - including treasure hunting, politicking, shopkeeping, guild management, full-scale wars and plenty of traditional game "quests".

Origin's development team is completely aware of the implications of such diversity and the desire of players to take greatly differing roles with such a game without fear of death at the hands of ruthless player-killers. After all, they have had three years of learning how to successfully run a MMORPG. So they have designed UWO: Origin to basically cater to all styles of players, especially the less visceral ones. New players will be protected from the harsh realities of the MMORPG (merciless and frequent death at the hands of other players), free to learn the nuances of the game. Once confident, players will be free to venture forth and experience the danger prominent outside of the safelands.

UWO: Origin will commence beta testing during Spring, and should be ready for a mid-2001 release.

March Stepnik



The Avatars

Clockwise from top left: The Meer, hailing from Avenosh; The Humans, from ye olde Britannia; and the Juka - who call the futuristic steam punk-themed Logosia their home.



Win Ultima Online: Discovery Edition!

Go on - treat yourself to a holiday in Britannia. Slay some dragons, chat up some members of the opposite sex, mine some ore! At least, until UWO: Origin comes around.

Thanks to EA Australia, we have **6 COPIES OF THE ULTIMA ONLINE: DISCOVERY EDITION CD** with one month's free access to give away to readers of PCPP.

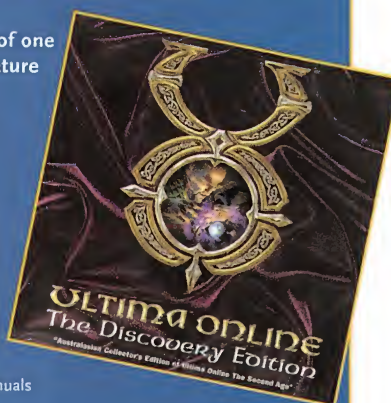
Just answer this simple question to be in the running:

Q. What is the name of one of the creatures to feature in UWO: Origin?

Send your entries to:
"I Want UO"
PC PowerPlay
78 Renwick St.
Redfern, NSW, 2016

Entries close 15th August, 2000

Prize consists only the Game CD and code for one month's free play. No packaging (including manuals and maps) are included.



Thief II: The Metal Age

WEB RESOURCES

MURRAY PHILBRICK HAS THE ARCHITECTURAL PLANS TO THE CITY

While it's quite true that Thief II doesn't include a multiplayer component, that doesn't mean its lifespan is limited. In the singleplayer campaign alone it can be quite tempting to run through the missions over and over again in order to discover every last secret area, gem, and coin. While for the more constructive-minded players there are even limited options for creating and downloading extra singleplayer missions. Moreover, Garrett himself has proved charismatic enough to spawn all manner of community interest, from his "personal journals" right down to fan fiction, across a host of Thief-related websites. Here's a few of our favourite haunts...

DromEd

Looking Glass Studios released an editor for Thief called DromEd, which includes some editing tools for creating missions and maps using the existing resource files of the game. While it's definitely not the most user-friendly editor ever created for a game, much like Goldie Hawn's makeup artist, you'll have to work with what you have.

If you have Thief Gold or Thief II you should be able to find the file dromed.zip on your game CD. Unzip it to either your Thief or Thief II directory. Note that if you want to edit Thief II, you'll also need to download the DromEd update (www.lglass.com/thief2/editor/dromed118.zip) and unzip the .exe file into the core Thief II directory, as well as have a patched version of Thief II.

Finally, you'll need to download the program called ThiefLoader (www.thief-thecircle.com/teg/tools/thiefload15.zip) in order to be able to run fan-created missions.

Once that's all out of the way, you'll probably want to check out Looking Glass' tutorial document on using DromEd (www.thief-thecircle.com/teg/guides/official/tutor.asp). After that, you should be away!



THE CIRCLE OF STONE AND SHADOW

www.thief-thecircle.com/

Rating: ★★★★★

One of the best sites out there for Thief and Thief II information and community-ness, this site is both packed with content and is well laid-out (which can be a rare find among fan sites). Basically, if there's anything on either Thief game or the Thief community as a whole that you want to find, this is the first place to look.

The information here covers things from fan fiction, tips, walkthroughs and bestiaries for both games, all the way through to level editors and user-created maps and missions (plus instructions on how to use them). It's all very clearly organised and labelled, and updates are both frequent and informative. There are also public forums and a whole host of extra links for the odd bit of information they may have overlooked (but if there was anything like that, my final few brain cells couldn't think of what they were, let alone miss them).

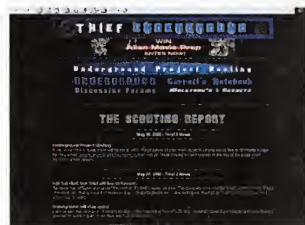
THIEF UNDERGROUND

www.3dactionplanet.com/thief/

Rating: ★★★★★

A Thief site with a slightly different bent, Thief Underground is primarily host to a hosting service and forum dedicated to expanding the Thief community (and in particular, supporting development of extra Thief missions). It provides both a meeting place for the Thief

fans, as well as hosting various services for any potential Thief community projects (though their preference seems to be hosting projects that use DromEd).

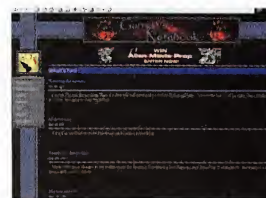


GARRETT'S NOTEBOOK

www.3dactionplanet.com/thief/walk/index.html

Rating: ★★★

Essentially a sub-site of Thief Underground, Garrett's Notebook provides walkthroughs and tips for Thief II. Its layout's not the prettiest you will have seen, but it loads quickly (no one's showing off their 1337 Photoshop 5k11z here) and is fairly easy to navigate. The walkthroughs cover every mission, and has detailed descriptions on finding secrets and loot in each (though covered outside of the walkthrough proper, for the most part).



TOTALITY

www.ridge7.demon.co.uk/thief/thief.htm

Rating: ★★★

One of the more interesting Thief projects, Totality is an alternate editor from DromEd that allows you to import new objects into the game (as well as other "in development" projects). It allows you to place your own custom 3D-Studio objects into the game environments, as well as download and add in objects from others. This is the only editor of its kind that is both easily accessible and with enough tutorials to shake a blackjack at. Worth a look if you're into the idea of more heavy-duty editing of the game (and can stand the somewhat confusing navigation).



Racing is in your blood

Actual game footage

***Along with small pieces of
rock and bone.***



Satisfy your craving for dirt-bike action, head-numbing crashes and outrageous stunts on over 40 tracks in 6 events including Stunt Quarry, Nationals, Baja, Enduro, Supercross and Multi-player Tag, and get that blood of yours pumping. Download the free trial version of Motocross Madness 2 at www.microsoft.com/games/motocross2



Microsoft

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SPOONMAN'S LAN DIARY

NETWORK MELTDOWN

Geelong, VIC

29/7/00 10am - 11pm

Players: 150

Cost: \$15

meltdown.qgl.org

Network Meltdown is a great LAN, and for your 15 dollars they provide food as well as a place for gaming. They have quite a few tournaments in the schedule, including Quake 3 and Counterstrike. They also boast a very fast network. A day-only event.

NEWCASTLE GAMERS LEAGUE

Newcastle, NSW

29/7/00 - 30/7/00

Players: 110

Cost: \$20

www.newcastlegamers.com

Talk about value-for-money gaming: you get two days of LAN action instead of one, and your twenty dollars even includes pizza! The NGL use a lightning fast network and have Quake 3 and Counterstrike Tournaments.

MPU

Sydney, NSW

12/8/00 11am - 11pm

Players: 220

Cost: \$22, or \$16.50 for members

www.mpu.com.au

The evergreen MPU runs each month at the same place, and is touted as Australia's best LAN. Well, it certainly is the biggest in New South Wales. While it only goes for one day it still provides a mammoth gaming experience which you simply have to see for yourself. Be fast as positions are filled very quickly.

FRAGS

Gold Coast, QLD

13/8/00 10am - 12pm

Players: 100

Cost: \$13

www.abco.com.au/frags/

A great thing about this LAN is that there's free Jolt Cola available to all players. Also, you can get all you can eat pizza for only \$5. FraGS has tournaments such as Quake 3 Arena, Counterstrike as well as Unreal Tournament. FraGS hold monthly events (sometimes 2 days as well), so check regularly on their website if you live in the Gold Coast Area.

For submissions, email spoonman@next.com.au.

Net Race Live

GO ONLINE AND RACE AGAINST THE PROS

www.netracelive.com

In a major leap forward for the online racing community, a bunch of bright sparks from the good ole US of A, have seen fit to offer Indycar fans, anywhere in the world, the opportunity to "virtually" mix it up with the best of the best. No, we don't mean simulated AI, or even other PC racing enthusiasts (though it is an option), we're talking about racing against the actual guys who do it for real!

The Net Race Live crew utilises technology and exclusive agreements with the Indycar racing leagues in order to accomplish this awesome feat! In each event, which is actually run in realtime during each meet on the Indy calendar, all of the real drivers' positional data is captured using high-tech onboard computers. This data is then streamed directly to your home PC, where you - the "virtual" race entrant - are inserted into the field to battle with the crème de la crème of the Indycar world!

Net Race Live is currently offering free trial memberships for anyone interested in trying it out. Though the trial membership doesn't offer any realtime racing excitement (a small membership fee is required to compete in the realtime events), available are previously run and archived races.

The only gripe I could muster from my Net Race Live experience was the primitive excuse for a physics engine. Because of its simplicity, and my prior experience with online racing sims, after only ten minutes of racing, I found I could consistently beat the likes of Andretti and Montoya (two of the biggest names in the sport), a feat that would certainly be impossible to replicate in real-life. Unless... Hang on, maybe I could give it a go...

Edward Fox



MOD

Q3 Platform Game

SIDE SCROLLING QUAKE ACTION

zygote.alphalink.com.au/humandebris/



As the name suggests, this is one of the more unusual modifications currently in development for Quake 3. Indeed, the idea of two fresh-faced Australian students is to turn id's cutting edge firstperson shooter into a side-scrolling platform game. At present, the beta version allows for deathmatch play with a few rather hopeless bots, but plans are underway to add a host of other features such as the ability to look up and down, a grappling hook, more intelligent bots, and - yes - a better name for the mod.

Sims Online

MAXIS CONSIDERS MOVING ITS FAMILY ONTO THE NET

■ When we caught up with Maxis at E3 last issue, there was more than just Simsville on the discussion agenda. As impressive as that neighbourhood sim might seem - which is quite a lot, actually - it was the news that Maxis is tossing around ideas for a Sims Online that really had our mouth watering. Click on Simsville's Executive Producer, **Christine McGavran** and select "Talk to":

"We're actually working hard on various online and multiplayer expansions for Sim City and The Sims," she revealed. "We don't have anything to announce right now, but I guarantee that it's something that's important to us."

The online community is something that Maxis has really tried to foster with its last few releases, isn't it? *Click.*

"With one of our games - SC3K or The Sims - if you go to the websites and you see what people are putting together, their stories - you know, these really are story telling devices for people," said **Tim Le Tourneau**, Producer on Simsville. "It's their way of unleashing their creativity."

"We've discovered that you don't always have to equate online with a persistent world, multiplayer game experience," McGavran argued. "The community that is built through people uploading and downloading content and just talking about what they've done is almost as valuable. You're still getting to know everybody and still sharing that experience."

Click!

"We don't want to take any multiplayer element and try to force it into a game that's inherently single player," she continued. "You know, with The Sims multiplayer: there's going to have to be fundamental gameplay changes. If we do multiplayer, it will be designing something that's right for a multiplayer experience so we don't sacrifice either side of it."

After clicking several more times, McGavran finally conceded that when Maxis does design a multiplayer game it will inevitably be based upon The Sims - doing anything multiplayer on the scale of Sim City is quite impractical at the moment. An online, multiplayer component for The Sims is what many gamers felt was missing from the original release. It looks like Maxis agrees. We'll keep you posted on further developments. But that's enough - it's been a long day and we've still got to take out the trash and get to bed.



SITE

Simsville

STILL SETTLING IN

www.simsville.com

Every Town Has A Story ...
What's Yours?

Simsville™



COMING IN 2001

[News & Previews](#)
[Screenshots](#)
[Videos](#)
[Fan Sites](#)

Incredibly, given the game has only just been announced, the official Simsville website already boasts links to dozens of fan sites set up in its honour. Elsewhere, the content is unsurprisingly slim with but a bunch of screenshots, a short video and some more links to some enthusiastic previews that are on offer. However, considering the support Maxis has provided online to players of all its games - especially The Sims - it shouldn't be too long before it is all up and running smoothly.

NGN Poll

Send your responses to ngn@pcpowerplay.next.com.au with "NGN Poll" in the subject line. Results of this month's poll to be published in PCPP#54.

In PCPP#49 we asked: "If you were designing a Star Wars massively multiplayer online game, what would it be like?" Unsurprisingly, the consensus was that the current plans unveiled by LucasArts don't really go far enough. Here's a sample of your views.

I think the Star Wars MMOG should allow people to create their own distinctly Star Wars character. A range of characteristics such as race, appearance and occupation (e.g. jedi, bounty hunter, smuggler) should be available as well. I think it should be possible to then travel to different locations in the Star Wars galaxy, interacting with others along the way. To make this as fun as possible, it would probably have to be multi-genre, mixing space sim while in transit with RPG/shooter while travelling on ground. Jetting out to Tatooine for a few drinks in the

Cantina with friends is quite an appealing idea, don't you agree?

Daniel Fletcher

What would I like in this MMOG? Probably exactly what it is not going to provide! Numerous cities/locations/planets to travel between and the ability to interact with anything and everything (which I believe a lot of games are getting better at providing now!). To be stuck on one planet wouldn't be a realistic Stars Wars universe. But in these early stages who is to say how good the game will be. Everquest may be a successful game. But will LucasArts be going for the buck, or players enjoyment? Here's hoping for better and more "realistic" games in the future!

Johan Kauffmann

I believe that the most important part of any Star Wars (online) RPG is space travel. The

best thing about the game would be the ability to travel to and from various planets. Travelling through hyperspace offers so many options that are left out if the game is confined to one planet. Think of it: you could be a smuggler, like Han Solo, delivering cargo to various parts of the galaxy. Or you could be a legitimate trader, who declares all goods. Another important part would be the ability to take sides. You must be able to choose whether you smuggle arms to the rebellion, or if you are an imperial informant.

Patrick Thomas

THE CABLE GUY

As the cable roll out gathers pace around the country, this month we want to ask you: "Are you considering upgrading to a cable modem? And if not, why?"

RANT!

WHERE DESIGN IS
LAW AND BUDGET
HAS RACING STRIPES

I read that Daikatana will need to sell 2 million copies in order to break even. 2 million copies? That's the cost equivalent of around 6 million music CDs, financially. Now, sure, Tom Jones (or any other hardcore punk artist, for that matter) may be able to wrangle up that many sales around Mother's Day, but when I asked my mother was entirely unsure of what Daikatana was. What's more, if I gave it to her for Mother's Day she'd probably see through my cunning ruse and take it back to the store (like the time I bought her a GameBoy), and I'd imagine 2 million units less 1 million Mother's Day returns doesn't quite cut Eidos' mustard.

In a snap poll later that day on the train I made more findings:

- 1) You shouldn't begin your first ever sentence to someone with the word "Daikatana".
- 2) For your survey to be taken seriously, people generally require you to own a nifty clipboard. I'm hoping for Eidos' sake that Daikatana is hailed by all as the greatest game since Barbie's Funhouse Mystery. If not, Tom Jones is getting my disco dollars this year - given that if a buddy caught me buying Daikatana without it being great, it'd probably be my personal equivalent of being caught buying an issue of Penthouse by the family minister. Good luck with those 2 million copies, though...

Murray Philbrick



IS DOOM 3 DOOMED?

ID'S TURN FOR SOUL-SEARCHING

DOOM 3 is id's next major in-house undertaking. Wonderful. But when you have a good think about it and go beyond the tremendous excitement that nostalgia so effortlessly generates (the original DOOM touched much of the gaming populace in a very special way), you've gotta ask, what will id do with DOOM 3 that'll see it deserving of such an important - and idolised - name?

DOOM had many charms: its sheer speed, the gross number of enemies you were pitted against (oh! the number of occasions you found yourself surrounded by upwards of a score of bloody thirsty grunts! Splendid!), and of course, the terrific level and character design. Ultimately, DOOM made such a huge impact simply because there was nothing else like it at the time.

Circa the year two-thousand, id software should have no problems delivering a visually stunning game engine, complete with level design to match. They've done it time and time again. But on the issue of one man against the hordes of hell (we're talking hordes to the power of 10 here), things aren't as promising. Given the polygon-hungry game engines of today, there's a much tighter limit on the number of characters on screen at the one time. That score has suddenly become a mere handful.

And now that the FPS - a genre id single-handedly created - is no longer virgin territory (there have been

countless remakes and rip-offs - aka "The DOOM clones" - since), you can't help but realise that DOOM 3 will have to offer something substantially innovative to be given a second glance, let alone walk without the crutch of its highly-regarded name.

Considering all this, DOOM 3 will be a significantly different experience to the original, if only by default. Whether for better or for worse, at this stage of the journey, would be pure speculation.

However if DOOM 3 turns out to be another rehash with nominal advancements over the "find the key/exit" theme - regardless of how pretty it all looks - I'm going to have to boycott it. id has the opportunity to prove that they're not just masters of the game engine, but of game design as well. That they can create another utterly captivating singleplayer FPS. Anything less that this will be met with harsh derision, on my part at the very least.

Until then, optimism that id will deliver - however valuable - won't be enough. I implore all discerning fans of the FPS (and the games experience in general) to get on those messageboards, to exercise their email accounts, and make id absolutely aware - in a thoughtful, intelligent, and above all, a constructive manner - *that a DOOM clone simply won't be enough.*

March Stepnik



SPREAD THE GOSPEL

THE SHIFTING SANDS OF AN INDUSTRY

We hear with a heavy heart this month that Looking Glass Studios has shut up shop - for all of the gory details see the feature that appears later in this issue. What the gamers of the world should remember, however, is that this is not an unusual occurrence. Game development is one of the more volatile industries of the present day. The heady cocktail of large sums of money, technology and producing entertainment means the potential for astronomical profits - and losses.

While a shock, since we'd seen so much quality from this particular developer, it is not necessarily all

bad news. What happens to all the ex-employees? They go out, join other developers, start their own companies and bring the spirit of Looking Glass to pollinate with other people and new titles.

From a creative perspective, what's more inspiring than a change of scenery? It's far better to remember Looking Glass Studios going out with a bang than a whimper. Blame the industry for the end of an era, but the next time you see a game with Eric Brosius' name on it, realise that it's not all bad news!

John Dewhurst

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PC PowerPlay is on the lookout for talented new staff to strengthen its position as the leading games magazine in Australia. There are vacancies for full-time and freelance writers who have expertise in both PC games and game-related hardware.

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PC Powerplay

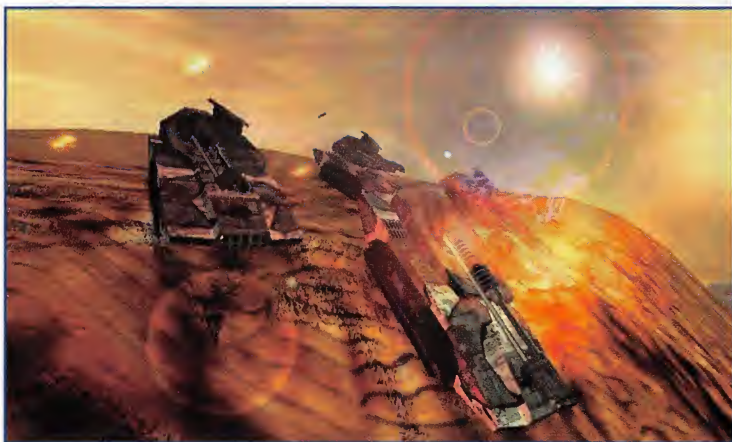
Next Media

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REALTIME STRATEGY'S OK SHOUTS OUT TO THE GROUND CONTROL MASSIVE!



Something strange happened to me this month: I found myself playing *and enjoying* a realtime strategy game. The quite superb Ground Control has rekindled my interest in a genre that was increasingly becoming an evolutionary dead-end.

Sure I bought Warcraft years ago after being impressed by the demo, but once the novelty of the comedy voices wore off the undernourished strategic elements were left horribly exposed. Half-finished, my copy went straight to the local second-hand store. Red Alert, Age of Empires, Dark Reign, even Starcraft, I've played them all with ambivalence - the strategy and complexity on offer in these games is clear, but I've never found them as satisfying as in the likes of Caesar or The Settlers. Traditional RTS titles, with their emphasis on production speed and click-fest combat, have always seemed far more like action games - and weak action games at that.

Recently, the expansive Age of Kings was certainly an improvement over the original and I did appreciate Homeworld - although I will confess to spending more time *looking at it* rather than playing it. But Ground Control has just blown me away - it's just so refreshing to find a game where your tactical nous is encouraged and rewarded. Maybe it's a realtime strategy for people who don't realtime strategy?

David Wildgoose



CHARTS

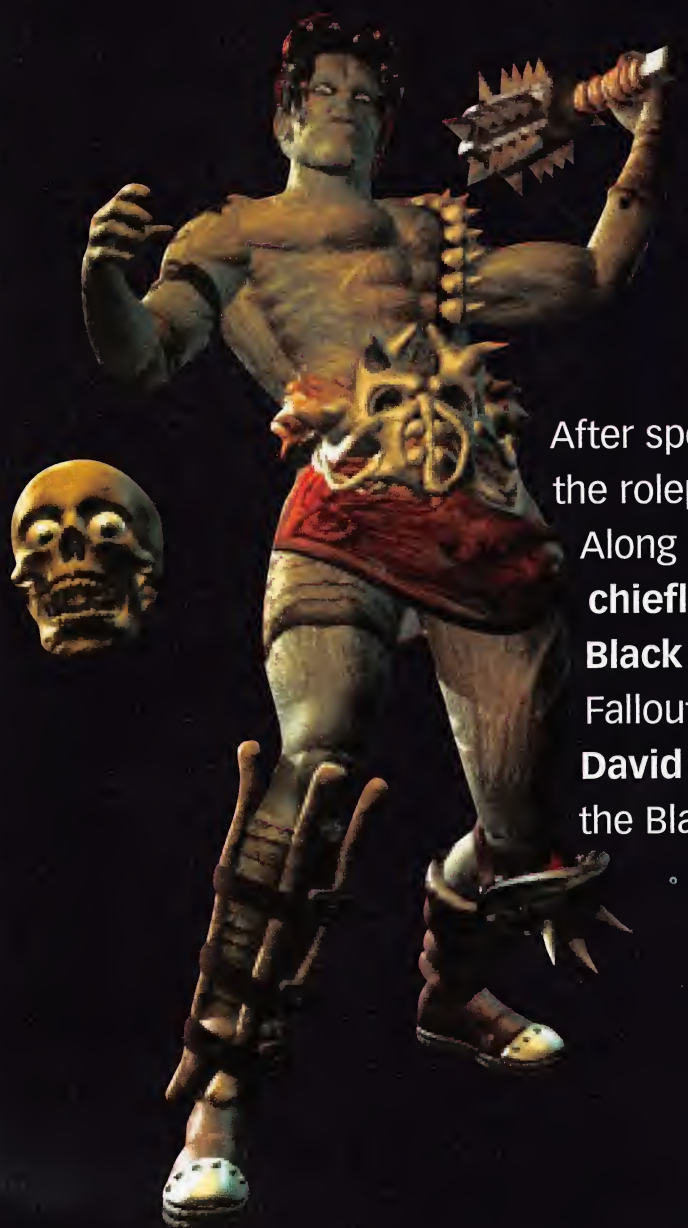


Charts supplied by Electronics Boutique

THIS MONTH	WEEKS IN	GAME/ PUBLISHER
1	19	THE SIMS ELECTRONIC ARTS
2	33	AGE OF EMPIRES II MICROSOFT
3	10	SOLDIER OF FORTUNE ACTIVISION
4	RE	C&C TIBERIAN SUN ELECTRONIC ARTS
5	14	C&C FIRESTORM ELECTRONIC ARTS
6	10	STAR TREK ARMADA ACTIVISION
7	NE	IMPERIUM GALACTICA 2 GT INTERACTIVE
8	NE	C&C WARFARE ELECTRONIC ARTS
9	NE	SIM CITY 3000 UNLIMITED ELECTRONIC ARTS
10	RE	ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON HASBRO
11	28	UNREAL TOURNAMENT GT INTERACTIVE
12	NE	STARLANCER MICROSOFT
13	9	THIEF II OZISOFT
14	RE	SYSTEM SHOCK 2 ELECTRONIC ARTS
15	RE	FIFA 2000 ELECTRONIC ARTS
16	10	NEED FOR SPEED: PORSCHE 2000 ELECTRONIC ARTS
17	NE	CRUSADERS OF MIGHT & MAGIC JACK OF ALL GAMES
18	14	FINAL FANTASY VIII OZISOFT
19	RE	QUAKE III ARENA ACTIVISION
20	28	HALF-LIFE ADRENALINE PACK DATAFLOW



Return o



After spending most of the 90s in the doldrums, the roleplaying game is back in a big way.

Along with Blizzard, **one of the developers chiefly responsible for this renaissance is Black Isle Studios**, thanks to the success of *Fallout*, *Baldur's Gate* and *Planescape: Torment*. **David Wildgoose** is your guide for a tour around the Black Isle...

f the RPG

Marked in blood on the ground before me is a pentagram, its five points decorated by turns with hallucinogenic fungi and the entrails of small, furry animals. An outbreak of anxiety almost overcomes me as I slowly chant the ritual litany. With my faltering step taking me into the centre of the star, I hesitate... But it's too late - there's a blinding flash of pure white light and soon all that remains is the lingering, fetid odour of charred flesh.

Welcome to Black Isle. The initial trepidation experienced by visitors to Interplay's best-known development studio is swiftly usurped by a feeling of awe. It's quite an imposing sight: surrounded by sheer cliffs on all sides, the main fortress towers into the acrid clouds above, while gnarled gargoyles line its parapets and the obligatory bats circle with menace. Once inside, the maze-like halls of the building - flanked with the skulls of (presumably) unwelcome guests - do little to settle the now-frayed nerves. I'm ushered by a demon that has no shadow into the throneroom to be greeted by an elderly man, swathed in shimmering, ethereal robes and leaning on a rather large staff.

It's **Fergus Urquhart**, Division Director of Black Isle Studios. "Sorry to keep you waiting. Are you here for the interview?"



It's a requirement that all Black Isle employees...

Studio Structure

I'm kidding, of course. Far from the grand wizard of my imagining, Urquhart is actually a mild-mannered kind of guy - with his ginger hair, spectacles and pale, boyish complexion, he bears many of the hallmarks of the typical computer geek. I begin by asking about the development structure at Black Isle.

In terms of both internal and external development, how many teams are there at Black Isle and how many games are in production simultaneously?

We generally have between five and seven games being worked on at any one time. Three



... wear silly helmets to the office each day.

of these will be done internally by the fifty-plus people who work in-house at Black Isle and the rest are produced by people here in Black Isle, but are developed externally by other companies like Bioware.

How do you manage that many games at once?

For the games that we develop internally, we usually have one game that is just starting up, one that is about midway through and another that is finishing up. Having them at these different stages sets up how where everyone is situated in the division. The games that are starting up have about 5-10 people working on them, the ones that are



BGII boasts a significantly larger view window.



The new spell effects are hugely impressive.



So much so that we had to show off another one.

midway through have around 10-15, and the ones finalling up have around 20-30. And that doesn't include all the Interplay people that work on Black Isle games, like our QA, Audio, and Video departments. There was probably a total of around 50 people working on Icewind Dale at the end, if one were to add the number of people in Black Isle and Interplay working on it together.

So it's not a case of one team being assigned to a particular game, rather that the various team members get shuffled around depending on the title?

As the projects move through development, different people are required to get them done, and this also changes how the teams are put together. For example, Technical Designers - or Level Designers - generally join a project when it is getting close to the finalling stage and then stay on through until it is finished. So there are a fair number of people on the division who have gone from Fallout to Fallout 2 to Torment and finally to Icewind Dale.

Each Black Isle series - Baldur's Gate, Planescape, Fallout, etc - is similar yet very



Baldur's Gate II: the eagerly-awaited sequel is on for an early September release.

different in terms of the 'feel' of the gameplay. Is this a deliberate strategy?

I am not sure if we have deliberately tried to make them different, or if they have just turned out that way. Having them be fairly different has turned out to be a real benefit, not just due to the fact that people see the games very differently, but because people in the division can work on a game that is very different than the one that they worked on previously.

As for keeping them distinctly different from a product line perspective - I think we will continue to do that, so that people can buy a Fallout game and feel that they have entered a completely different world than Baldur's Gate.

Right, so despite all of the differences between the individual titles, do you think there is a definable or distinctive Black Isle game? In other words, is there a common thread that runs through each game that you produce - besides the obvious fact that they are all RPGs?

I think we really strive at Black Isle to create quality games that take the player away. That probably sounds very generic in a lot of ways, but it's what we try to do. We try to make the games truly feel alive. The designers create line after line of dialogue to try to think of what the player might want to do in the game - not just what we want them to do.

We also really try to round out each of the games that we work on with a high attention to some things that can be added on as an afterthought like audio. I am pretty amazed at the amount of money that we have spent on audio in our games, but it has also paid off. People are still talking to me about the talking heads in the Fallout series. Not just because of how they looked, but because of how they sounded.

Baldur's Gate II

ANOTHER TALE FROM THE SWORD COAST

Designing a sequel to one of the most successful games of recent times - Baldur's Gate was the best-selling game in Australia in 1999 - has been a challenge for Black Isle and developer Bioware. Fans will expect a major improvement over the original and yet also want it to recapture the same atmosphere at the same time.

Baldur's Gate II remains set in the Sword Coast region of the Forgotten Realms, with much of the quest taking place in the merchant city of Amn and featuring a number of characters from the first game. Additions include more and higher-level player and non-player characters, as well as hundreds of new spells, items and monsters. Visually, BGII appears more impressive - 3D accelerated spell and lighting effects, support for 800x600 resolution and less general screen clutter all contribute significantly to its graphical appeal.

On schedule for an early September release, who knows what you might find in the review section of next month's PC PowerPlay...





Neverwinter Nights: destined to change the way we think about online gaming.

Roleplaying design

Character interaction and storytelling are both interesting problems for roleplaying game designers, I would imagine. Both elements seem to still be in their infancy, remaining relatively unsophisticated compared to other media. How do you approach these aspects when drawing up the concept for a game? Storylines and character interaction in computer RPGs are fairly strange things. They can be like that of Final Fantasy in which there is a very highly developed story, but the player is forced along it in a very linear fashion. Or they can be like Fallout that underneath are linear, but the player is not really forced along it to a great extent.

Is it a case of moulding the story around the limits of interaction?

The way the storyline is created dictates in some manner how character interaction works. In a very linear RPG you can have characters that play very singular roles that can, in essence, know a lot about a very little. While in the more non-linear RPGs it is almost the opposite - the characters need to know a little about a lot. They often have to be created in that fashion so that they serve the storyline as well as they can, and not require an infinite amount of designer time to make them function almost like a true human would. We could create characters with tens of thousands of lines of dialogue to make them feel truly interactive, but there would then probably only be two characters in the game - the one that gives the initial quest, and the final bad guy... [Laughs].

Actually, that might make for a really interesting game, you never know... Okay, seriously, how do you strike that balance between linearity and non-linearity when trying to tell a story? How



The engine is fully customisable.

do you give players a strong narrative as well as freedom of choice?

The way we have chosen in most of our games to give the feeling of freedom is to have a linear game that does not appear to be linear. The linearity that exists underneath provides the vehicle by which the player finishes the game, but if they don't feel driven down it then the game appears to be non-linear. Ultimately the

Neverwinter Nights will allow people to play AD&D the way it was meant to be played

player needs a goal and a way to reach that goal or they would be playing some akin to the Sims where there really isn't an "end".

Sure, but what's the secret in practical terms?

Well, we try to create a huge variety of other sub-quests, areas, and people that have very little or nothing to do with the final goal. These other elements round out the world and make it feel more alive, and not just a place where everything exists to move the player towards the goal. I think the other thing we have learned

Neverwinter Nights

LET THE ONLINE ADVENTURE BEGIN...

Believe it or not, the early concept for Neverwinter Nights was inspired by Quake - or, more accurately, the online community id's game has established since its release. The idea behind this was to create a game where players could actually set up their own servers and edit their own worlds using the AD&D rule system. Black Isle and Bioware have been developing the game with this foremostly in mind.



"What this is going to allow is for people to really play AD&D on the computer the way it was meant to be played," says Urquhart. "Players will be able to have servers that run small modules, or will even be able to link up computers together to create their own mini-persistent worlds."

The key to the success of Neverwinter Nights will therefore be to ensure the server and editing tools are not only cutting edge technology, but live up to expectations. Who said the RPG was old-fashioned?

to do is to tell the story a little differently. Very few people or things in the game have complete parts of any single clue. We spread clues and concepts all over the game, so that the player almost builds the story themselves.

Is the story or the character interaction the crucial thing with RPGs, or is it something else? I will probably be burned at the stake by some

for saying this, but I would say that the most important aspect of an RPG is the character advancement. However, I do think that without a strong story, setting, and character interaction an RPG can get stale very quickly. The problem is that without a strong character advancement system, the player can begin to feel that they are not evolving or moving forward in the game. An RPG is really there for people to do things that they can't do in their real life, and going from a Level 1 person to a Level 99 God, really gives people a feeling of progression and



Planescape: Torment remains Black Isle's crowning achievement.

we are thinking about how to approach the massively multiplayer environment as well, and we could choose **Fallout**

accomplishment. In some ways this is the line between an Adventure game and an RPG. An RPG with little character advancement, but a very strong story could almost be considered an Adventure game.

Into the future

There's still a few more years left in the agreement with the Wizards of the Coast for Black Isle to make games based on Advanced Dungeons & Dragons. I'm curious as to what you think of AD&D as a rule system?

The AD&D system is both incredible to work with, and difficult to work with at the same time. I think one of Black Isle's designers said once that AD&D 2nd Edition is not so much a rule system as an exception system. The exceptions make the rule system interesting in that there are a wide range of character types, weapons, combat actions, spells, etc...

Do these idiosyncrasies make designing a computer RPG harder?

Yes, those same exceptions make it very difficult to create a computer program around. Computers like things that can be summed up in equations - even complicated equations, not long lists of explanations on how a certain spell works well under this circumstance, half as well under this circumstance, applies to these sorts of monsters but not these, or can be negated by this special item, etc...

Finally, looking to the future - perhaps even beyond AD&D - what does the future hold for Black Isle Studios? You've already licensed Monolith's Littech 2.0 3D engine...

That's the most difficult question! I can tell you we intend to continue licensing engines like the Bioware's Infinity Engine, and the LithTech engine. This is mostly because we see our strength in the creation of all the content that makes up an RPG and having to create engines can easily compromise this. We are thinking about how to approach the massive multiplayer environment as well, and we could choose Fallout or another genre for that game. However, we are still looking at all the technologies out there, and have not settled on one.

The one thing that I know we will continue to do is to focus on RPGs. We learn more about making them every time around, and while some people may find making the same kind of game over and over somewhat tiring, I think we see it more as a challenge. How can we make it look better, play better, and be even more engrossing than the last game? These are the things we strive for every time we start on a new project. All in all, I think we have made a good effort on all the games we have made, but I believe there is much more that we can do in the future.

Thanks for your time, Feargus. Do I really have to do the thing with the pentagram, the blood and the lightning again to get out of here? ■



Fallout's talking heads were unforgettable.



Er... not a game for kids, obviously.

The Black Archipelago

SO WHERE ARE THE NEXT INSTALMENTS OF FALLOUT AND PLANESCAPE?

Despite being produced by another Interplay division - 14 Degrees East - and developed in Canberra by Microforte, Fallout Tactics looks set to continue the Black Isle tradition. The major new feature is the introduction of multiplayer (with up to eighteen players) to complement the game's focus on tactical combat, while weapon modification and the ability to use vehicles in combat will only further the roleplaying depth of the title.

According to Urquhart, Planescape: Torment almost killed the guys who worked on it, due mainly to the incredible amount of dialogue that needed to be written. As such, they're not especially in a hurry to get started on a sequel! But nor are they completely ruling out the possibility either...



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MASSIVE SELLOUT

GIANTS

CITIZEN KABUTO

IT'S MORE THAN A YEAR BEHIND SCHEDULE, **YET GIANTS IS LOOKING BETTER THAN EVER.** LET'S SNAG SOME GIANT SHEEP ON OUR TUSKS AND EMBARK ON A SCENIC STROLL AROUND **ISLAND...**



The Sea Reapers: as skilled with the bow and arrow as they are at distracting opponents with their "feminine wiles".





DETAILS

- Genre: Action
- Multiplayer: Yes
- Developer: Planet Moon Studios
- Publisher: Interplay
- Due: 4th Qtr 2000
- URL: www.planetmoon.com

It takes a great big sopping demonstration of willpower to pull yourself away from the hypnotic effect of *Giants: Citizen Kabuto's* visuals. There's something innately beautiful about *Island*: a beauty that transcends taste and style, and simply is stunning. Lushly vegetated plains, random forests, insipid shorelines, ragged mountain tops and mesmerising waterholes make up *Island's* geographical texture. Forget gameplay for a moment here: this game is absolutely beautiful.

The postcards (er, screenshots) do a splendid job of delivering *Giants'* strong design ethos - as far as static images go - and imparting the highly organic and natural theme of the landscape. However, once the game is loaded up and is witnessed in motion, *Island* truly takes on a character of its own. Planet Moon Studios (a small group of ex-Shiny members and the creative talent behind MDK and the *Earthworm Jim* series) has created a virtual paradise - one that simply begs to be explored with naught else but a sense of awe and wonder. Vegetation sways gently in the air currents, water laps against rock and shoreline, packs of wildlife pound the landscapes, searching for the next abundant patch of grazing to feast upon. Things don't come any more tranquil than this. You could quite easily sit there and watch it for hours on end if it wasn't for that great big Giant bearing down upon you in the distance.

No one is more pleased (and immensely proud) of the visuals than Planet Moon Studios themselves. Yet they like to point out that there's a lot more to *Giants* than its look.



Kabuto is rumbled in his cunning underwater hiding place.

THE GIANTS CASTING COUCH

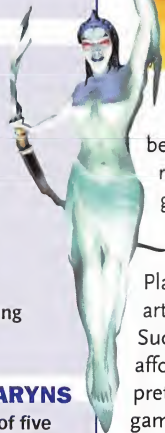
KABUTO

With no access to weapons or spells, Kabuto instead relies upon his strength to get his way on Island. He can crush villages with ease, hurl makeshift missiles (think trees and giant boulders) and build things - including bridges to get him over to previously unreachable locations.



THE SEA REAPERS

An ethereal race highly evolved in elemental magicks - particularly water based ones. As her magic ability develops, she can let loose some impressive (and powerful spells) - in particular the hurricane, which sends anything in its path whirling helplessly into the sky.



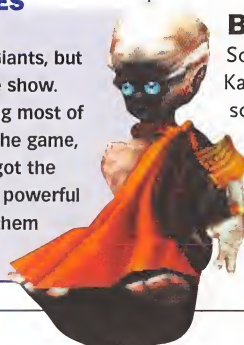
MECCARYNS

A group of five chummy beer-swilling spacemen with cockney accents - Baz, Tel, Reg, Gordon and Bennett - who have crash-landed on Island. The Meccs are small and agile (compared to Kabuto), with an impressive military arsenal at their disposal.



THE SMARTIES

These guys play a supporting role in Giants, but they often steal the show. Apart from providing most of the comic relief in the game, the Smarties have got the technology to build powerful weapons - putting them in high demand.



"In a way we've moved beyond the visuals and we're really more interested in the gameplay and how it feels now," explains Nick Bruty, founder and president of Planet Moon Studios and co-art/design director on Giants. Such sentiments are easily afforded - Giants is one of the prettiest and visually interesting games in development after all. "Obviously you'd put it down in three minutes if it just didn't work. The visuals are just there to back up the gameplay and reward you," he adds. If Planet Moon can put half as much personality, originality and pure polish into the gameplay side of things as they have the visuals, surely Giants is destined for Gaming's Hall of Fame.

Bloody huge

So what is Giants: Citizen Kabuto all about? The screenshots drop a few hints - there are a couple o' small buggers in space suits; thinner, smaller guys with big heads; voluptuous sea maidens naked from the waist up; and, of course,



one great, big, bloody giant on the slice o' paradise. A more disparate group of game characters we never did see.

It was established early on that Giants is an action game employing a thirdperson over-the-shoulder perspective. But with news that players would be able to build bases and exploit resources in the quest for domination, more than a few heads turned.

"It's definitely an action game," asserts Bruty, "but it does have a very light version of base building in there - basically it's a nice way to upgrade your weapons and increase the challenge and fun in the game." Certainly, Giants borrows elements from the realtime strategy genre. However it is in principle only - dispel any thoughts of an action shooter/RTS hybrid here.

Primarily, Giants: Citizen Kabuto is an action game - documenting the events that occur when three very different races clash together. While there is a fantastic and compelling narrative (packed with essentially British humour - think Monty Python meets Red Dwarf) driving the singleplayer game, it is Planet Moon's use of character in

the core gameplay that is its most promising aspect. Planet Moon has taken the most basic action elements and warped them into something wonderful. The Meccaryns - five lads on holiday that have landed on Island to conduct repairs - represent typical action fare. These guys have access to a range of weapons, and take on their enemies the old fashioned way - they point and pull the trigger. The Sea Reapers take this a step further. Although they have no access to conventional weapons, they are well versed in magick, and thus can let loose a vast array of useful (and often devastating) spells - the visuals effects of which will certainly send shivers down your spine. And Kabuto - the great big giant himself - takes a further step from convention. He has no weapons or magical abilities, so instead relies on his brute strength to wreak havoc on those in his way. His weight effortlessly crushes anything unlucky enough to be underfoot, and his musculature allows him to snatch potential meals within arms length with ease. But when you consider his sheer size, the full extent of the Kabuto's charm

GIANTS AND THE RTS ANGLE

In *Giants*, the primary resource is energy. For example, Kabuto displays an incredible metabolism and thus needs to be constantly snacking to maintain his strength. The primary food source happens to be Island's Vimps (these could share kinship with our humble cow), although Kabuto could eat any living creature for an energy boost - and that included Meccs! The Sea Reapers need the same energy to power their collection of powerful spells, which results in a simple formula - the more they collect, the more spells they can cast. The Meccaryns, however, collect Vimps to feed the Smarties - in return for assistance (Read: the production of new weapons and buildings such as gun turrets - great protection from wondering Gargantuans).



Delphi's in training to be the next spokesmodel for Sunsilk's next advertising campaign.



Baz was an avid nature photographer. Until he found a gun.

becomes apparent. He's monstrous - big enough so that Island suddenly seems like a much smaller place. Planet Moon has further enhanced this sense of scale: by tweaking the engine to include a thunderous roar and lightly shaking the view every time Kabutos sets his foot down, players get a sense of the gross weight he carries and uses to his advantage. All this serves to heighten the Kabuto experience - when you play this character, you can't help but feel like you're a lumbering giant hulking about a massive playground. Absolutely delightful stuff.

Golden game design

Getting *Giants'* gameplay right has been one great big balancing act, and it was in developing the

multiplayer side of the game that Planet Moon discovered just how diverse a style of play the three races brought to the fray. How do you pit a couple of small cockney space jockeys against a lumbering behemoth? There are obvious discrepancies in ability between the three races, extending far beyond the subtle balance necessary of your typical action game.

So Planet Moon has created a giant game (excuse the terrible pun) of paper-rock-scissors. Each strength has a weakness, so successful play (in the singleplayer game, but particularly in multiplayer) requires a delicate balance between offensive and defensive strategy. For example, Kabuto has strength and size on his side -



his musculature allows him to snatch potential meals within arms length

allowing him to decimate the world with a single swipe or step. However, his size is also an Achilles heel - the Meccs and Reapers can spot Kabuto from great distances and can easily outrun, or catch-up to his massive frame. Of course, those agile Meccs could quite easily keep their distance and slowly wear away at Kabuto's great strength until his demise - a cunning though unfair exploit. So Planet Moon lowered the amount of damage the weapons did, meaning that such a tactic, whilst successful, would take an eternity to realise. So a cunning solution: they've introduced a vulnerable spot (not unlike the chink in Smaug's armour) which is only accessible once enemies come in close proximity to Kabuto. Hitting this spot inflicts great damage, so daring players will be drawn to come in close for the kill - within arms reach of the powerful brute.

Planet Moon has also devised a development system that carefully builds up each of the three character's strengths and abilities over time, and gradually introduces new gameplay elements. These range from new weapons and spells to new physical abilities (in the case of Kabuto), to further complicate the delicate game balance.

"Kabuto's strong at the start, and can easily quash the Meccs," explains Bruty. "So the Meccs can hide in bushes to get around until they gain access to some powerful weapons. But as they get more powerful - and can do real damage from hiding - Kabuto has the opportunity when he eats certain creatures to enhance his vision and his smell, so that he can see the scent of a character - even when they're hiding in the bushes. This way, the Meccs will have to stop using sneak tactics and come out into the open for full scale battle."

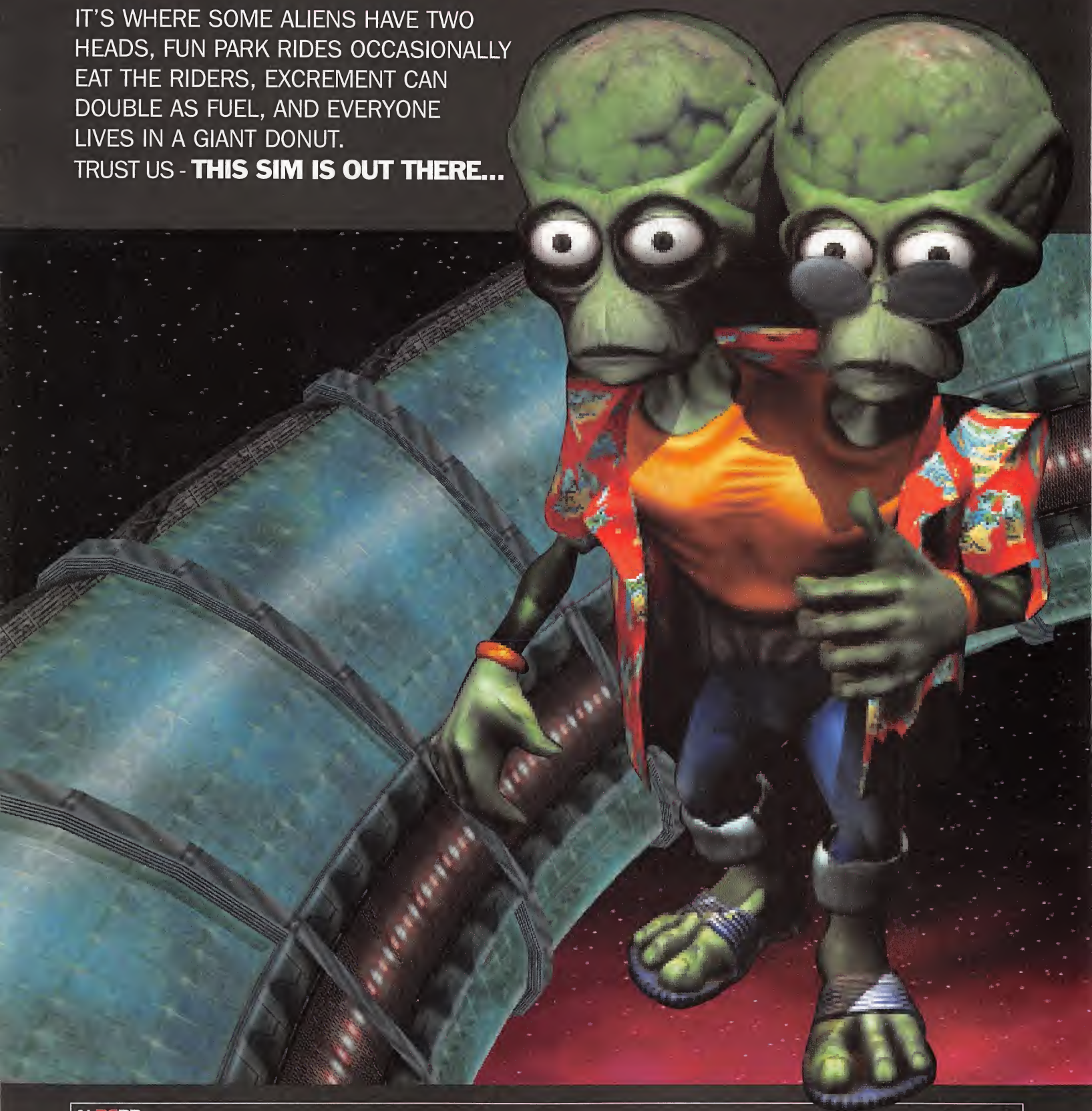
Giants: Citizen Kabuto represents an innovative new approach to the action genre. Not only does it look beautiful and display a high level of polish, it promises to be an absolute blast to play. After nearly three years of development, *Giants* is nearing completion. Prepare yourself for something truly special.

March Stepnik

STAR TOPIA

IT'S WHERE SOME ALIENS HAVE TWO HEADS, FUN PARK RIDES OCCASIONALLY EAT THE RIDERS, EXCREMENT CAN DOUBLE AS FUEL, AND EVERYONE LIVES IN A GIANT DONUT.

TRUST US - **THIS SIM IS OUT THERE...**



The space station of many a science fiction author's imagining is a meeting point. Not only does it encapsulate the isolated, insular nature of the pioneering colony - its inhabitants are intergalactic settlers; it also, if the writers are to be believed, throws up a chaotic, cross-cultural and usually cross-species mix of lifeforms - its inhabitants are cosmically cosmopolitan. The space station is both the tiny frontier town and the diverse metropolis in one. It sounds like the ideal setting for a god-sim kind of game - surprising no one has thought of it yet...

Star Topia, then, is a god-sim kind of game set aboard a space station. After the now ubiquitous

Bad pun ahead

However, like its developer's absurd moniker, Star Topia is far from being a dry, statistic-heavy management game. There are two-headed aliens for a start.

Mucky Foot kicked into life when a group of Bullfrog coders decided to leave to form their own development studio following their former employer's absorption into Electronic Arts several years ago. With a history of acclaimed god-sim or management style games behind them (Populous, Dungeon Keeper, Theme Park and Hospital), they confounded expectations with their first release, Urban Chaos - an ambitiously freeform action/adventure (85% in PCPP#46). This was a good thing,

and a collection of charismatic creatures, a far cry from the cutesy Theme Park World.

Giving the aliens a strong personality is the key here. What Mucky Foot has done here is dissolve the usual statistics and bar graphs typically used to inform the player of the status of his citizens. Instead, a more direct approach has been adopted. Click on any creature and it'll stop in its tracks to tell you how it's feeling. If it's hungry it will nod its head. If it's feeling overworked it will pull its hair out. If it's been getting its leg over it will give you a big thumbs up.

"These animations not only give you a good idea of how the different inhabitants of your station are feeling," says Burnham, "but

Star Topia is far from being a dry management game. There are two-headed aliens for a start

apocalyptic war, the great space stations of the past are now nothing more than orbiting detritus - space junk. But as the universe slowly rebuilds, these stations are seen as prime real estate. It shouldn't take much entrepreneurial nous to realise that the rings of Saturn are a view to die for.

The player begins the game by managing a segment of a station, ushering in the galactic visitors, and tempting them with (unidentified) life's essentials and luxuries, and trying to ensure that the whole deep space operation runs smoothly. The station itself is torus-shaped - like a big donut - in which echoes of Larry Niven's Ringworld or Star Trek's Deep Space Nine can also be heard.

As the player's wealth escalates, opportunities will arise to purchase vacant neighbouring lots on the station, until eventually economic border wars will erupt with business rivals. Manage your segment of the station better than your competitors - computer AI in singleplayer, online friends in multiplayer - and hopefully they will be driven out of business.



The Mucky Foot crew.

as Mike Burnham, Mucky Foot's Head of IT, explains: "Making [Urban Chaos] was a message to the gamers out there that, although many of us are ex-Bullfrog, we do have skills that stretch into many gaming genres - and indeed, skills enough to do them well."

Now with that particular monkey off its back ("Off its ankle", surely? - Ed), Mucky Foot believes it can feel comfortable about releasing a game like Star Topia. Indeed, with two members of the original Theme Park team, both the project lead and the lead designer of Theme Hospital, a Dungeon Keeper team member, and one engine programmer from Bullfrog in the ranks, it was inevitable that Mucky Foot would, if you will, return to its roots.

While Burnham concedes that the game will still manage to draw plenty of Bullfrog comparisons, he's keen to stress that the ex-Bullfrog guys comprise only half the team. "The rest of the team are also driving the game forward," he says. "The other thing to remember is that we are not tied down to the kiddie-driven Theme style or the overly bookish management style of certain other games." Indeed, Star Topia seems driven by a sharp combination of black humour

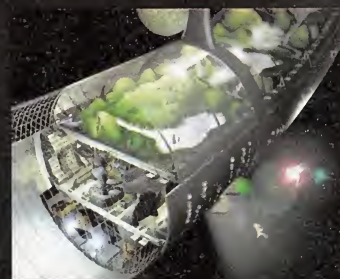
also increase the degree of empathy between you and your alien punters." Though I'm not sure how much empathy the player is going to feel toward a certain creature whose waste products can be used as fuel for the station...

Beds and cocktails

The space station itself has three discrete levels: an engineering deck, a pleasure deck and a bio deck. It's through the construction of buildings and areas on all three levels that the happiness and productivity of visiting aliens is maintained.

DETAILS

- Genre: Sim
- Multiplayer: Yes
- Developer: Mucky Foot
- Publisher: Eidos
- Due: 4th Qtr 2000
- URL: www.muckyfoot.com



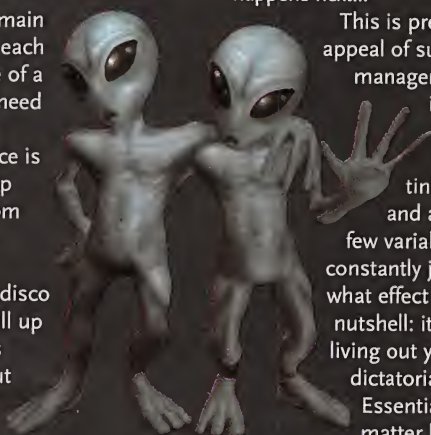
StarTopia's characters have been designed to tell you - in no uncertain terms - what they're feeling. These two are obviously, well, happy.





For example, the Kasgorvian - a thuggish, warrior race - appreciates the spirit-raising effects of a good pub, a cheap bed and a fighting pit in which to train. Others, such as the more scientifically minded Turakken - the aforementioned two-headed guys - feel more at home in the environs of a high tech laboratory or swanky cocktail bar.

With nine main alien species, each representative of a basic human need or emotion, a delicate balance is needed to keep them away from each other's throats. "You might build a disco and watch it fill up with scientists jiving away, but then warriors and some monks might come aboard and start making their way towards the disco," Burnham begins. "Now you might get away with that, but



you could try to avoid trouble by building a cheap bar to distract the warriors. Or while those guys are arguing in the disco, you might place a computer supplies shop outside to catch the passing scientist trade that you think are about to vacate the dancefloor. But whatever you choose you will want to wait and watch to see what happens next..."

This is precisely the appeal of such management sims - it's all about being in control, tinkering with and adjusting a few variables constantly just to see what effect is has. In a nutshell: it's about living out your dictatorial fantasies. Essentially, no matter how much we may loathe our political leaders, we would all jump at the opportunity to have a go at it ourselves - if only because we think we could do a better job.



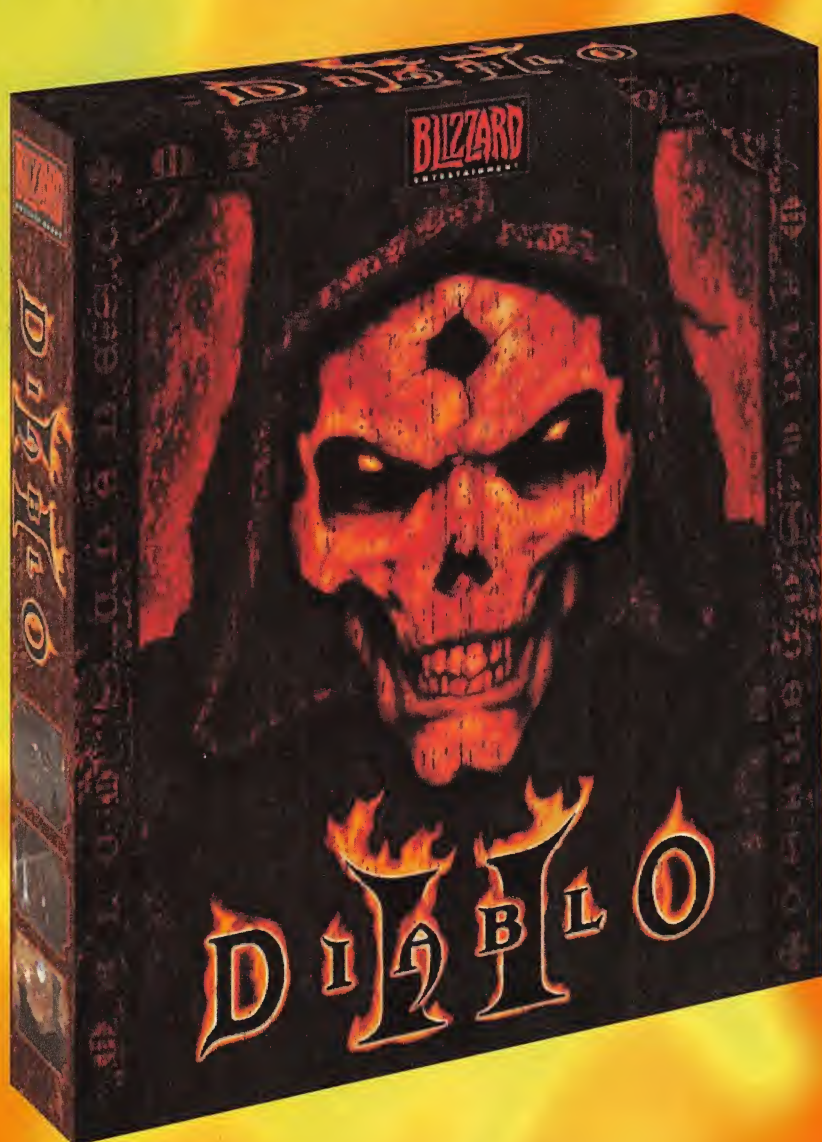
However, there's more to Star Topia than just merrily building away, tasking subordinates here and there, and generally managing the station. Mucky Foot has implemented a strong mission structure, meaning that one moment you may be defending a research institute then trying to combat a plague of vermin the next. But, of course, if you just want to build and build into the infinite black yonder, then you can do that, too.

David Wildgoose



Maximus sluggus - no doubt a shrewd politician.

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Crimson Skies will put you in all manner of precarious situations.



DETAILS

- **Genre:** Square-jawed Aviation Action
- **Multiplayer:** Yes
- **Developer:** FASA/Zipper Interactive
- **Publisher:** Microsoft
- **Due:** 4th Qtr 2000
- **URL:** www.zipperint.com

Some time ago the Microsoft Corporation, soon to be known as the Company Formerly Known As The Microsoft Corporation, bought a well-established pen and paper board and roleplaying game developer called FASA. Apparently their parking lot was just the right size for Bill's train set. Purely by

The game takes place in an alternate time line where the road and rail links across America were never built, McDonald's was a Scottish pub and handlebar moustaches were never, ever associated with homosexuality.

Without road or rail the country turned to aviation as its main mode of transport across a continent divided into nation states like ancient Italy. Into this rough and tumble world of action and adventure is where you, the player, will test your mettle against the ghastliest and most fiendish villains ever to take to the skies. Rescuing damsels in distress, barnstorming around the

The unfortunately named John Howard, Crimson Skies' lead designer, stepped out of his hot tub long enough to answer some hard questions for us this month and, without further ado, here are his thoughts.

PCPP: The original FASA Crimson Skies has quite a large following. How much input or consultation did you have from fans and players of the boardgame version?

JH: Keeping the audience happy by entertaining them is always something we strive for. Well, we're all fans and players of the boardgame so I'd say 100%. Actually FASA Interactive developed the Crimson Skies boardgame before we joined Microsoft. A lot of the guys that worked on the boardgame have also worked on the PC game, including Jordan Weisman and Dave McCoy, the universe creators.

PCPP: How much of the original boardgame has been carried over to the PC version? For example, will players be able to design their own aircraft?

JH: Crimson Skies is all about being a badass daredevil fighter pilot in a universe that is built around fighter pilots. An action-oriented air combat game is a lot different from a boardgame but we always remain true to the Crimson Skies universe.

dogfight inside a zeppelin hangar and chase an enemy ace through a train tunnel



coincidence Microsoft discovered that FASA had the rights to the Mechwarrior series, as well as some other products ripe for exploitation - one of those was Crimson Skies.

Top gun

Crimson Skies is a rather bold move for Microsoft, especially as it doesn't involve obtaining an unrestricted pilot's license to play, or inspire a legion of fans sporting Tom Cruise hair cuts and wearing Top Gun jackets with "I did it in Flight Simulator 2000" embroidered on the back.

countryside and securing the world's supply of Brill Cream, what more adventure could anyone ask for?

The payload options for your aircraft are some of the most intriguing ever devised for a flight sim, including aerial torpedoes, ceramic-coated magnesium bullets and even sonic rockets which stun pilots but leave their planes intact. Not since LucasArts' Secret Weapons Of The Luftwaffe has a flight sim looked like being so much fun - and, quite frankly, any game with zeppelins has our seal of approval!



For those who are familiar with the boardgame, there are eleven airframes in the PC game including the Fairchild Brigand, the Hughes Firebrand and the McDonnell Kestrel. All of the airframes can be flown in their default configurations or customised with different guns, rockets, engines and paint schemes using the Plane Construction system.

PCPP: What is your expectation of the recommended PC specs to play the game near or at its best?

JH: The minimum spec for Crimson Skies is a 266MHz Pentium II with 32Mb. The game supports D3D so a wide variety of videocards are supported. The game also runs without hardware acceleration. Obviously the higher your system specs the better, but the minimum spec performance is solid.

PCPP: Have the 'sim' aspects been toned down for more action-oriented play?

JH: I think we have "sweetened" the physics rather than toned them down. Crimson Skies is defiantly an action-oriented game, so we want you to spend time fighting your opponents instead of your controls. We have created something called "ground blow" that helps you pull out of steep dives.

This is important because most of our missions take place in the terrain at about 500 feet instead of 5,000 feet over it. We want you to dogfight inside a zeppelin hangar and chase an enemy ace through a train tunnel. This is what being a daredevil is all about.

PCPP: How much gameplay will be involved outside the cockpit in terms of tactics and strategy?

JH: All of it. Like I said, we don't want you fighting your controls. We've created a lot of missions that go far beyond the standard "fly here blow up this, fly there blow up that" kind missions found in most vehicle combat games. In

Crimson Skies you get to rescue beautiful German scientists off the backs of speeding locomotives, compete in an Ace-of-Aces stunt competition through a Hollywood movie studio backlot and steal a British bomber by dropping out of your plane and knocking out the bomber pilot before tossing him out and flying away!

PCPP: Will Crimson Skies be a retail game on the Zone or a premium game requiring payment to play?

JH: You can play Crimson Skies free over the Zone. We've spent a lot of time building and testing multiplayer. In addition to solo and team dogfighting you can play Capture the Flag and Zeppelin vs. Zeppelin, a base attack/defend game. Crimson Skies and the Zone also have support for tournaments and player ranking.

PCPP: Does the gameplay take a campaign format and if so how many missions will this include?

JH: Crimson Skies has three play modes: Campaign, Instant Action and Multiplayer. The Campaign mode puts you in the role of Nathan Zachary, an infamous air pirate and international playboy. Nathan and his gang, the Fortune Hunters, travel across America looking for sunken treasure in Hawaii, rescuing old friends from the Russians in the Pacific Northwest, kidnapping movie starlets in Hollywood and all sorts of other cool stuff. The campaign spans 24 missions and five chapters.

PCPP: I noticed the Hughes Corporation gets a mention as a manufacturer. Will there be a Spruce Goose in the game?

JH: Let's just say that the massive hangar behind the King Kong set

in the Hollywood movie studio isn't full of props...

PCPP: I have read that you started out at FASA as their webmaster. How does one go from webmaster to Lead Designer?

JH: Hard work, persistence. The only way I know how to get into the games business is to get a job - any job - in the business. I called people for months before anyone returned my calls and I started working at FASA Interactive as a webmaster because it was a way into the company. Once I was inside I saw what really goes into making games and started to understand how the process works.

PCPP: Nostalgia and retro chic has been big business ever since the baby boomer generation started aging and the fashion/design worlds started running out of ideas. Did that provide any inspiration for this project or give you a reason to think it would succeed commercially?

JH: I think the retro chic thing has had a certain influence on the project, but trade chasing is a really dangerous occupation. I think the attraction to Crimson Skies is more lasting because the 30s were the last romantic period in American history. The clothes, slang, music and attitudes had a class and a style we've lost since then. The world was still full of mystery and unexplored places before WWII, the atomic bomb and men on the moon made it feel a lot smaller.

I think that is why we started looking backwards for ideas; we have lost our sense of mystery. And that's what I really like about Crimson Skies, it's a world full of mystery where excitement and new adventures are just over the horizon.

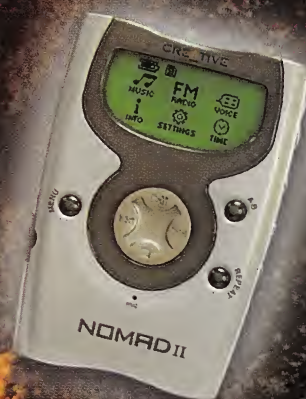
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WARCRAFT III

THE COMPETITION UPON REALTIME STRATEGY'S 3D BATTLEFIELD HEATS UP

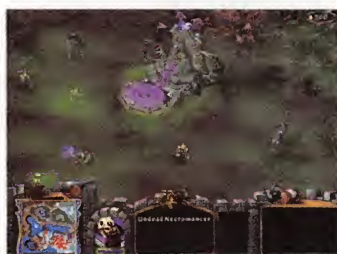
Comprised of polygons, the units are surprisingly well animated.



DETAILS

- Genre: Realtime Strategy
- Developer: Blizzard
- Publisher: Havas
- Distributor: Jack Of All Games
- Due: Early 2001
- URL: www.blizzard.com

■ Much recent speculation about the third in the Warcraft series has centred round its release date. Initially expected later this year, it now seems that a first or even second quarter 2001 ship is more likely. The delay should allow Blizzard sufficient time to perfect the essential gameplay balance between the game's five unique races, as well as to counter the impressive forays made by the likes of Dark Reign 2 and Ground Control into its 3D RTS territory.



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER

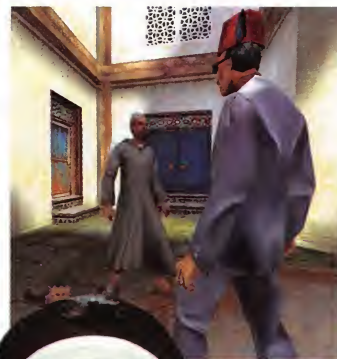


1960S STYLE INTERNATIONAL ESPIONAGE - JANE BOND, ANYONE?

DETAILS

- Genre: Action
- Developer: Monolith
- Publisher: Fox Interactive
- Distributor: Electronic Arts
- Due: 4th Qtr 2000
- URL: www.the-operative.com

■ Monolith's next-generation - thanks to the Littech 2 engine - action title has been given a personality overhaul during the past six months. Cate Archer, an agent for the exclusive international anti-terrorist outfit UNITY, has come on board as the main character. Packing a wide array of gadgets and weapons (a mini-welder, knockout gas, a robotic poodle and an assortment of firearms), her welcome charisma ought to set No One Lives Forever apart from most of its FPS rivals.



Watch the bullets fly!



How come she's wearing black gloves in all the screenshots?



The stunning Littech 2 engine in action.



TROPICO

THE CREATORS OF RAILROAD TYCOON II TAKE A TRIP TO THE CARIBBEAN



The stash of Cubans are hidden in the clock tower.



DETAILS

- Genre: Strategy
- Developer: Poptop Software
- Publisher: Gathering of Developers
- Distributor: Jack of All Games
- Due: TBA
- URL: www.poptopsoftware.com

■ Mixing empire-building with political backstabbing, Tropico may be set on an island in the Caribbean but your life as a dictator isn't exactly a beach. With decisions such as whether to build a sugar plantation or a headquarters for the secret police, Poptop is crafting a strategy game like few others.

POOL OF RADIANCE: RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR

A LONG-AWAITED UPDATE FOR AN RPG CLASSIC



DETAILS

- Genre: Roleplaying
- Developer: Stormfront
- Publisher: SSI
- Distributor: Mattel
- Due: 4th Qtr 2000
- URL: www.poolofradiance.com

■ This belated sequel - the original Pool of Radiance appeared way back in the mid 80s - is an attempt to recapture the true spirit of pen-and-paper roleplaying that developer Stormfront believes has been lost with recent computer RPGs. To this end, the game will make use of the 3rd Edition Advanced Dungeons & Dragons rule set, play more akin to an adventure module rather than full-blown campaign, and feature a Dungeon Master to narrate events as the player progresses through the quest.



RUNE

HUMAN HEAD PREPARES TO WIPE THE BLOOD FROM ITS NORDIC ACTION TITLE



DETAILS

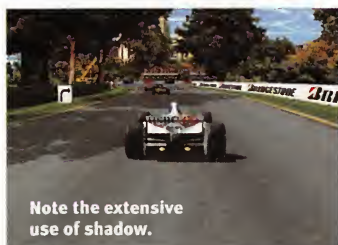
- Genre: Action
- Developer: Human Head
- Publisher: Gathering of Developers
- Distributor: Jack of All Games
- Due: 3rd Qtr 2000
- URL: www.godgames.com

■ Action games that focus on hand-to-hand combat have generally fared poorly in the online and multiplayer community. Human Head will try to impress its online credentials by releasing a range of editing tools for Rune as well as setting up a website to host the best mods created by fans. Check out www.runegame.com over the coming months for more information.



GRAND PRIX 3

COMFORTABLY IN POLE POSITION, GP3 IS SECONDS AWAY FROM THE GREEN LIGHT



DETAILS

- Genre: Racing
- Developer: Microprose
- Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
- Distributor: Hasbro Interactive
- Due: 3rd Qtr 2000
- URL: www.grandprixgames.com

■ Grand Prix 3 should be just weeks away from being wheeled out onto tarmac as you read this. In the garage, however, the body-wrap is off and... Wow, this is looking to be the most exciting Formula One simulation to date. The team is currently putting on the shine in preparation for the final release, with news that Geoff Crammond is coding vibration and dynamic wheel physics into the force feedback capabilities of the sim.

But we're all incredibly anxious to put Albert Park through its paces on a wet one. Until race day, these telling shots will just have to suffice.



GP3 features our very own Albert Park race track.

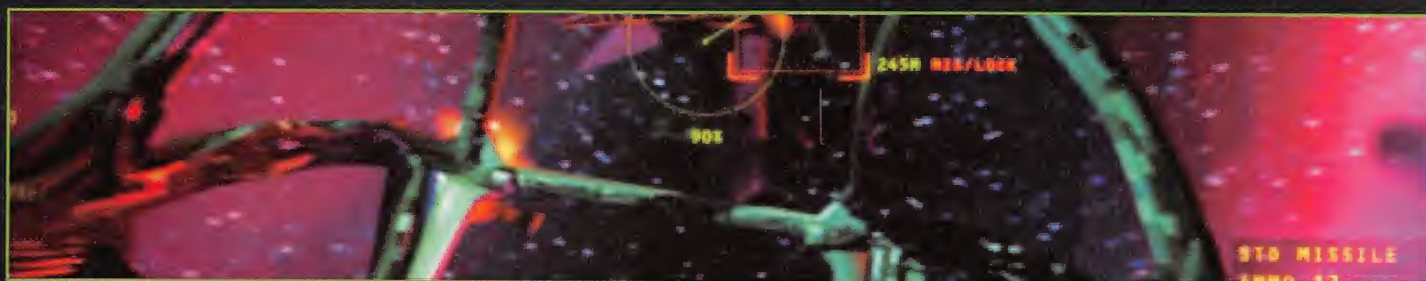


SPACE SIMULATION AND COMBAT GAMES HOLD A NOBLE RANK IN PC GAMING HISTORY. BUT WHERE IS THE GENRE HEADING IN THE FUTURE? **BRETT ROBINSON** TRAVELS BEYOND THE EVENT HORIZON...

Interga



Galactic!

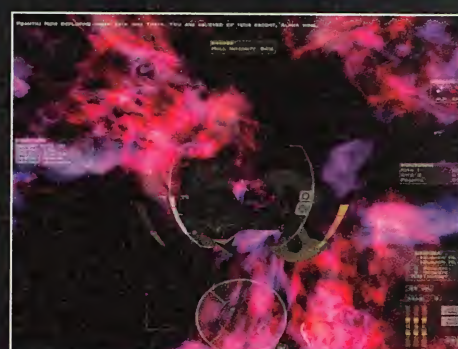


When Origin's Wing Commander burst onto the scene in 1990, few predicted that its success would spawn a genre that is, just a decade later, one of the largest and most popular in the industry. Chris Roberts' groundbreaking game sold in record numbers and brought the concept of space combat to the fore. Unfortunately, it also succeeded in prompting countless developers, starry-eyed with the thought of the profits to be gleaned from exploiting the potential inherent in the fledgling genre, into inundating the market with a deluge of frighteningly mediocre clones.

More Wing Commander titles followed, as did countless clones. But it was only when Wing Commander: Privateer was released that consumers sat up and took notice. Privateer's phenomenally immersive gameplay immeasurably improved on the features of its spiritual forefather, Elite. Raking in vast quantities of cash by smuggling narcotics and alien porn into Pirate colonies was one of the game's primary attractions, and the tenets of capitalism reigned supreme once more. Sadly, the cloning continued unabated, and many gamers began to lose faith in a genre that had once brought them such joy. Thankfully, salvation arrived (albeit several



Another stunning Independence War 2 cut scene.



Freespace 2's capital ships dwarfed the player's.

years later) in a completely unexpected form; one that would irreversibly change the face of space sims in the ensuing years.

Ingenious innovations

UK-based developer, Particle Systems, raised the 'realism' bar significantly with the release of Independence War. I-War's innate complexity stemmed from its implementation of a true Newtonian physics engine that factored elements like velocity and momentum into the way entities within the game environments interacted with their surroundings. This system made it possible for skilled pilots to employ a combat strategy

that was the space-based equivalent of the staple of every firstperson shooter - the circle strafe. Building up enough momentum in a particular direction made it possible for accomplished pilots to rotate their craft to attack foes without having to face in the direction of travel. This proved a particularly effective manoeuvre in multiplayer battles, and when taking on heavily armoured capital ships and space stations. It also revolutionised the way space combat engagements were fought. In traditional, Wing Commander style games, fights between spacecraft often bore striking similarities to the jousting matches of



Cultural diversity is reflected in Freelancer's bars...



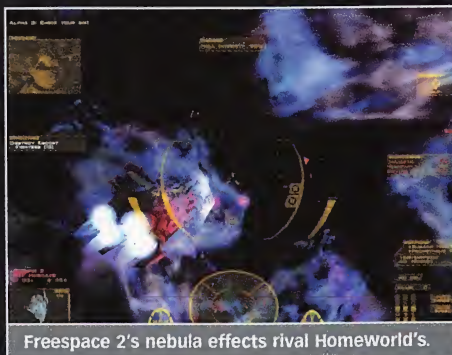
...but indulging in a few too many is risky.



Independence War 2's visuals are simply breathtaking.

medieval times. Thus, the combatants would fly toward one another, firing their weapons all the while, then turn around and repeat the process. Hardly riveting stuff - a point driven home by disappointed buyers of LucasArts' X-Wing Alliance.

I-War, on the other hand, made space combat an art form in itself. In order to avoid annihilation at the hands of multiple adversaries, players were forced to perfect their combat manoeuvres, and hone their spatial awareness to extraordinarily advanced levels. In placing the player at the helm of a Dreadnought-class Corvette, as opposed to the pilot's seat of an agile fighter, it also shifted the core gameplay dynamic from simply flying and fighting, to managing weapons and engineering sub-systems, and issuing orders to subordinates. In spite of these quantum advancements of the genre, Independence War proved unsuccessful in the retail sector due, primarily, to an almost non-existent advertising campaign. As a



Freespace 2's nebula effects rival Homeworld's.

ships that appeared to be truly gargantuan when compared to the player's puny craft, but little else. Space, the ultimate milieu in the eyes of many gamers, also remained largely unexploited in the massively multiplayer realm.

One of the few exceptions to the dearth of massively multiplayer space sims was Microsoft's Allegiance - a relatively enjoyable

Starlancer, the result of a collaborative effort between brothers Chris and Erin Roberts, was simply bursting with the kind of quality gameplay that many came to expect from one of the industry's most high-profile duos, but fell below expectations in the originality department. The dazzling graphics, expertly designed campaign and intriguing storyline aside, Starlancer was little more than a rehash of countless other space sims. But for those disillusioned by the obvious lack of innovation within the genre, a whole new generation of space simulations is set to emerge.

Make it so

One particularly exciting title is Star Trek: Bridge Commander. The game will see the player assume the role of Captain of Galaxy and Sovereign-class Federation ships similar to the Enterprise NCC-1701D and the Enterprise-E respectively. In staying true to Star Trek lore, many familiar races will make an appearance, including the Cardassians, Ferengi, Klingons and Romulans. An undiscovered species, rumoured to live beyond the Romulan border, will also be introduced. Adding to the game's authenticity will be the voices of none other than Captain Jean-Luc Picard and Commander Data. From the tastefully subdued and exquisitely comfortable Captain's chair, the player will be able to glance around the expansive and highly detailed 3D bridge of their chosen vessel. This will be the position from which orders to fellow officers will be issued, and various systems monitored. For those more inclined to perform tasks themselves, it will also be possible for the player to jump into the body of certain crew members and perform their assigned duties manually.

Independence War revolutionised the way space combat engagements were fought

result, the game was inevitably dubbed 'the greatest space sim nobody played', and joined the ranks of similarly unappreciated titles like BattleZone, System Shock 2 and The Nomad Soul.

A lull in creativity

In the years following I-War's release, the nature of space combat simulations remained virtually static. Descent: Freespace and Freespace 2 both offered a minor innovation in the form of to-scale capital

game that combined fast-paced dog fighting with the coordination of flight groups and resource management. Unfortunately, the combat element of Allegiance felt very watered down, leaning toward the blast-fest end of the scale and offering nothing new to space warfare veterans. Admittedly, the frenetic pace - induced by the need to ensure that crucial structures remained intact - made for a satisfying short term experience, but Allegiance did little to advance the evolution of the genre.



Bridge Commander will bring the action and intrigue of the tv shows to PC.



Smuggling contraband in Privateer.



Wing Commander: The game that started it all.

The intimidating bulk of the craft at the player's disposal will make fighter-like manoeuvring impossible. Instead, combat will often be a decidedly tactical one-on-one affair, with an emphasis on positioning and the strategic deployment of weapons. This slower pace of battles, and the limited number of participants, will be analogous to the drawn-out games of cat and mouse 'played' by WWII submariners - a prospect that more than a few Star Trek buffs will no doubt relish.

Terminal Velocity

The distinct lack of publicity surrounding the impending release of Terminus is rather disturbing, considering how promising this title appears. Vicarious Visions' ambitious game will combine the most positive elements of Independence War and Privateer into what could potentially be one of the greatest space sims ever. A Newtonian flight model will give the game instant credibility with I-War fans, and hopefully succeed in introducing scores of uninitiated players to the freedom and versatility conferred by such a system. The dozens of different ship chassis available to the player will be fully configurable with myriad weapons and other devices acquired through purchase, theft, capture or salvage. The player will also be able to adorn their vehicles with custom paint jobs for that personal touch.

Four different playable factions - the Martian Consortium, the Earth League, the Pirates and the Merchants - will make for a very rich and varied campaign. The non-linear, dynamic storyline will feature one hundred scripted plot and side missions, four thousand scripted events and six possible endpoints. For those with a love for Elite and Privateer, Terminus' Free Flight



Terminus: gotta love those bars.

mode will be a dream come true. Thousands of randomly generated missions and in excess of four hundred different commodities, unique items and artefacts will render this the most comprehensive space trading title in existence. The Free Flight mode will also boast - cue drumroll - a completely dynamic economy.

Because of its basis on the principles of supply and demand, the player will have to be extremely savvy in their business dealings with various colonies, and attempt to exploit situations like naval blockades and famines, where the demand for certain commodities will skyrocket. Within this mode, mission contracts offered on public information networks will be undertaken, and it will be possible for the player to post contracts of their own. This will then enable the player to hire escorts when embarking on dangerous cargo transport missions, employ wingmen on assault sorties and pay bounty hunters to take care of those bothersome pirates or business competitors.

The way of the future

Developing games in a similar vein to Terminus are Particle Systems and Digital

Anvil. The two companies appear certain to continue their tradition of innovation with the creation of their respective products, Independence War 2 and Freelancer. Both titles will share numerous traits - namely gameplay dominated by trading, a far broader scope than most space sims and a massively multiplayer component - but they will also differ significantly. I-War 2 will once again sit at the more realistic end of the spectrum, and will endeavour to cater to the 'hardcore' space sim crowd.

Freelancer won't focus so heavily on a realistic flight model, but will instead offer a mouse-driven interface that promises to grant the player the freedom to target specific components on enemy ships. This simplified approach will also streamline the way that craft are piloted, negating the need for the player to memorise countless keyboard commands.

Although both are still some time from release, their effects on the genre will surely be both beneficial and widespread. The excitement and the anticipation that is surrounding their development will undoubtedly serve as a wakeup call for those competing developers who seem only too happy to continue creating space sims with a cookie cutter mentality.

Encouragingly, titles like Bridge Commander, Independence War 2, Freelancer and Terminus seem indicative of a paradigm shift in the very nature of space simulation development. Increased complexity and depth, and greater player autonomy, are taking precedence over simplistic action - something gamers everywhere should wholeheartedly welcome. And, as for the distant future? We can only really dream of what's to come.

THE TOP 100 ONE HUNDRED



GAMES OF ALL TIME

W

Welcome to the inaugural PCPP Top 100 Games coming to you live from Sydney, Australia! The little park on the corner of Elizabeth and Devonshire St might not quite be Homebush Stadium, but it's the best we could organise at such short notice. As the athletes make their way into the arena, it's fair to say that this year's opening ceremony is shaping up to be quite spectacular. Already the crowd

has grown into double figures. Unlike January's Top 50 event, today we will be playing host to the most playable, entertaining, challenging and downright fun gameplay experiences to be had in the year 2000. While Doom, for example, may have been a revolution for its time, now it has been well and truly surpassed by the likes of Unreal Tournament and Quake III. Thus, we present to you - the 100 Best Games Game of All Time. And now it's over to our master of ceremonies, John Dewhurst...

The PCPP Top 100 was compiled by: Agata Budinska, James Cottey, John Dewhurst, Edward Fox, Des McNicholas, Hugh Norton-Smith, Murray Philbrick, Brett Robinson, George Soropos, March Stepnik, Mike Wilcox and David Wildgoose.


DUKE


You must be a little disappointed with your performance?




Goddammit!
The competition here is tough, especially for humans... Oh, who am I kidding? Synchronised swimming was never really my thing anyway; I'm getting outta this fruity town. (grumble.. grumble)


100	Score NA Developer Taito Released 1999 Reviewed NA	BUST-A-MOVE 4 A great arcade conversion that is as addictive on the PC as any other platform. Innocent fun for those who like their games as simple as they come. Gotta love that Japanese style!	
99		DUKE NUKEM 3D Firstperson shooters don't come with this kind of humour any more. A solid, extremely playable action title for its day, with a great big irreverent tongue in its cheek.	Score 90% Developer 3D Realms Released 1996 Reviewed PCPP#3
98	Score NA Developer Digital Image Design Released 1996 Reviewed NA	EF2000 Landmark title amongst flight sims that presented the absolute best of aerial action in 1995. More than filling the gap as everyone waited for Falcon 4.0, EF2000 was detailed and realistic.	
97		DRAKAN Superbly engaging Lara-esque adventuring as Rynn, the green eyed girl. High quality controls in thirdperson and who can pass up the chance to ride a giant red dragon?	Score 84% Developer Psygnosis Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#43
96	Score 79% Developer Access Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#44	LINKS LS 2000 The one and only golf sim for the serious armchair putter. Improvements on Links 99, however slight, make this the best in a series with as much pedigree as the games world has to offer.	
95		PRINCE OF PERSIA The Arabian Nights flavoured classic of PC platform gaming. This featured the perfect balance of problem solving, running hither and yon, and sword swishing. A marvel in the history of PC games.	Score NA Developer Broderbund Released 1989 Reviewed NA
94	Score 95% Developer Origin Released 1996 Reviewed PCPP #7	CRUSADER: NO REGRET An undeniable classic of the isometric top-down view action shooter genre. Featured much improved weaponry over its predecessor, Crusader: No Remorse, and a story that was twisty like spaghetti.	
93		COLONIZATION Using the Civilization engine - though not as complex or deep as that classic - Colonization nevertheless gave us an enthralling strategy event on a more intimate scale. And you could displace those pesky Indians.	Score NA Developer MicroProse Released 1994 Reviewed NA
92	Score 93% Developer Ratbag Released 1998 Reviewed PCPP#32	POWERSLIDE An overlooked home grown classic of dirt racing. Exceptional race engine and track design from Ratbag, this helped them become a developer to watch. No nonsense cyber-rally joy to play (still!).	
91		MICRO MACHINES 3 Top down racers were all the rage in the arcades of yesteryear - here this frantic joy was recreated in miniature - kitchen tables, gardens - you name it. The spiritual father of Revolt.	Score 80% Developer Codemasters Released 1998 Reviewed PCPP#29


Score 9/10 Developer Parallax Software Released 1996 Reviewed PCPP#1	DESCENT II The pinnacle of the Descent series, featuring true 3D shooting action against other machines (so there's no messy blood stains). A great game that inspired as much vertigo as excitement.	 90
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	ACES OF THE DEEP Aces of the Deep combined solid graphics, a sharp interface, and a great atmosphere to produce a game that was years ahead of its time in the reality stakes. Arguably, this underwater classic still hasn't been equalled.	Score NA Developer Dynamix Released 1991 Reviewed NA
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Score 96% Developer Westwood Released 1997 Reviewed PCPP#19	BLADE RUNNER A gem from three years ago, this graphic adventure brought the cold and bleak world of the feature film to our PCs. Visually stunning - enough so to make a grizzled old sci-fi fan weep.	 88
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	THEME HOSPITAL An inventive new take on the Theme series. Combining management antics with medical comedy could hardly miss - watch those exploding heads! Not a major sales success however... go figure.	Score 90% Developer Bullfrog Released 1997 Reviewed PCPP#12
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Score NA Developer God Released 1994 Reviewed NA	SHANGHAI Puzzle games don't usually collect any praise, but this mah jongg series gave the avid player a PC outlet. The introduction of multiplayer in this instalment allowed Dynasty to shine.	 86
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	GUNSHIP! Helicopter simulation where as the gunner you are in command. Pilot AI is very impressive, and the interface is clear and functional - making for a high level of control in the action.	Score 89% Developer MicroProse Released 2000 Reviewed PCPP#50
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Score 84% Developer DMA Design Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#44	GRAND THEFT AUTO 2 A step up from the original with improved AI and the whole situation of gang tensions lending some more thrills to your mindless destruction. Causing social mayhem was never more enjoyable!	 84
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	SOUL REAVER A vampiric action adventure with the works. Lots of dandy twists like the need to feed on the souls of others and the ability to switch planes add to the gruesome rollicking.	Score 81% Developer Crystal Dynamics Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#43
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Score 86% Developer Raven Software Released 2000 Reviewed PCPP#49	SOLDIER OF FORTUNE Realism in violence taken to places we barely knew we wanted it to go in an FPS. Impressive advances in detail (particularly location damage) make this an important title.	 82
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	BROKEN SWORD The high class British graphic adventure at a time when it was an all-American industry. An engrossing storyline and super dialogue afforded this game critical acclaim.	Score 89% Developer Revolution Software Released 1996 Reviewed PCPP#6
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DECATHLON



Strong contenders in this event, yes hmmm yes, always difficult to call - at this level only HEART can bring home gold. Blade Runner performed admirably, this being his third Olympics, a veteran if you will. In the end, Soul Reaver showed the most guts - usually of the spectators. Gold, gold, gold for Britain!





WRESTLING





Hmm, ugly scenes here at the usually above-board wrestling. There's been an early disqualification for Soldier of Fortune. Who would've thought a head could come off so easily? Alpha Centauri showed class and experience, while the younger Septerra Core had lots of character. Yipes, the Japanese team looks great, don't they?





80	Score 88% Developer Pumpkin Studios Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#38	WARZONE 2100 Pioneering Realtime Strategy meets Firstperson Shooter in 3D - quite a first. Fantastic gaming, in that spacey militant expansionist style, and the catalyst for a whole new strategy genre.	
79		SUPERBIKE 2000 Gorgeously realistic motorcycle racing, with a terrific physics engine (pun intended) that leaves even the bikers in awe. A great addition to the two wheel racing genre.	Score 89% Developer EA Sports Released 2000 Reviewed PCPP#49
78	Score NA Developer MicroProse Released 1994 Reviewed NA	X-COM: UFO - ENEMY UNKNOWN The X-com series has seen a number of incarnations but this was the best: turn-based battle and resource management in the noble campaign to thwart an alien invasion.	
77		PRIVATEER A venerable moment in Wing Commander history with a strong design and lively characters. The same can not be said for its regrettable sequel, Privateer 2: The Darkening.	Score NA Developer Origin Released 1992 Reviewed NA
76	Score 9/10 Developer Bethesda Released 1996 Reviewed PCPP#1	TERMINATOR: FUTURE SHOCK A gem in the history of the FPS. Offering much more than high levels of violence, Future Shock featured compelling missions and a great narrative for an action title.	
75		SEPTERRA CORE Anime RPG adventure gaming a la Final Fantasy. A real winner considering the pickings on the PC in this genre are so slim. Great story and loads of atmosphere.	Score 84% Developer Valkryie Studios Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#47
74	Score 96% Developer Firaxis Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#36	ALPHA CENTAURI Who're they kidding? This is Civ II in space and just as well since there's enough quality in THAT game for a dozen reincarnations. The wannabe-intellectualism was a toss, though...	
73		JEDI KNIGHT: DARK FORCES 2 This is Star Wars gaming long before Episode 1 - when it didn't suck! An FPS with an intriguing storyline, some clever setpiece levels and of course the light saber.	Score 95% Developer LucasArts Released 1997 Reviewed PCPP#18
72	Score 85% Developer Sports Interactive Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#38	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 3 Soccer management verging on the sadistic. This is the most comprehensive and detailed of the series, which is no mean feat. The best of an admittedly niche gaming genre.	
71		SETTLERS II A stand-out in a genre affectionately known as "little blokes strategy". The perfect blend of empire management, combat and strategy makes for hours of compulsive play.	Score 87% Developer Blue Byte Released 1996 Reviewed PCPP#3


Score 91% Developer Bungie Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#35	MYTH 2 - SOULBLIGHTER Realtime strategy without the resource management (unless you count your men), this was a great update of the original. Chivalrous fun with a Sam Raimi inspired sense of humour.	 70
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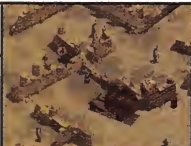
	EUROPEAN AIR WAR A glorious advertisement for war (well, nostalgia for WWII anyway). The opportunity to fly as the allies and German pilots in the furious skies of Europe. An example of Force Feedback put to great use.	Score 91% Developer MicroProse Released 1998 Reviewed PCPP#31	69
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Score 84% Developer EA Sports Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#44	MADDEN 2000 Big boofy blokes without the balls to go head to head in nought but shorts and jerseys - it has to be gridiron. Exciting player animation and an authentic treatment make this a sports gaming event.		68
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	RALLY MASTERS A shockingly good physics engine lies at the heart of this game. While not visually as impressive as its contemporaries, it made up for it in its awesome driving experience.	Score 89% Developer Digital Illusions Released 2000 Reviewed PCPP#50	67
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Score 94% Developer Core Design Released 1996 Reviewed PCPP#9	TOMB RAIDER The original femme fatale action hero title. By far the most superior in level design, its sequels have changed little, since this was such a strong title. You go grrrr!!		66
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	BALDUR'S GATE Black Isle RPG that does the roleplaying effortlessly and excellently. Traditional in the fact that it is combat-laden, with great visuals, music and fine game design.	Score 87% Developer Bioware Released 1998 Reviewed PCPP#35	65
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Score 82% Developer Pyro Studios Released 1998 Reviewed PCPP#28	COMMANDOS: BEHIND ENEMY LINES Nazi-bashing squad based action that was enough of a challenge for most of us (which is saying a lot). The realtime strategy elements meant Commandos had a fresh twist in standard genre territory.		64
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	QUAKE 2 A completely fresh take on the phenomenon that was Quake. Awesome single player game with as much strength in its multiplayer - you know the rest. New futuristic style a big winner.	Score 94% Developer id Software Released 1997 Reviewed PCPP#21	63
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Score 92% Developer LucasArts Released 1997 Reviewed PCPP#21	CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND Perhaps not the best in the Lucasarts series but who could seriously play the original today? Continuing the series in style, this is a genuinely funny game - a rare thing in gaming. Papapeeshu!		62
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	URBAN CHAOS Freeform action joy. Freedom to approach missions in many different ways and the countless sideline additions flesh this all-out brawl into a complete non-linear gaming experience.	Score 85% Developer Mucky Foot Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#46	61
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LARA
 Lara Croft, international model, adventurer, idol and still with enough time to compete here - how do you do it?



Yes, well shooting has always come easily to me and I just love it! Training is always tough but mostly it's just finding a t-shirt that fits...



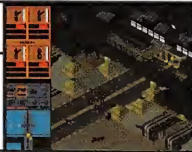








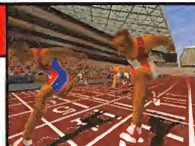
GUYBRUSH

Guybrush Threepwood!
Master Fencer, how are you
enjoying Sydney?





Sydney?
Where the hell am I?? Last
thing I remember I'm taking
a nap in a dinghy and next
thing I'm stranded on this
cannibal island! Gee,
Elaine's gonna be REALLY
pissed off...





60	Score NA Developer Bullfrog Released 1992 Reviewed NA	SYNDICATE Isometric squad based criminal mayhem. The dark mood and involving mission-based action gave the gamer a criminal outlet when this type of game wasn't common. And it was long!	
59	 Score 87% Developer Sierra Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#44	GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 After the disappointment of The Beast Within (FMV - what were they thinking?), this stands out as an instant classic in a sadly dying genre. Dry wit and some creepy moments - just the ticket.	
58	Score 91% Developer MicroProse Released 1998 Reviewed PCPP#25	M1 TANK PLATOON II The groundbreaking tank simulation in a genre that normally sees gradual development. A faithfully reproduced war surrogate that spawned an equally impressive sequel.	
57	 Score 94% Developer New World Computing Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#35	HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC III The particular strategy joys that HoMM offer taken to new heights of greatness. Expanded variety in all aspects of the game together with improved AI make this the best in the series (until the next!).	
56	Score 90% Developer Oddworld Inhabitants Released 1997 Reviewed PCPP#18	ABE'S ODDYSEE Humanitarian plea to the gaming world or just a great game with a heart-warming story? It hardly matters as this game returned the platformer to us with humour and spirit.	
55	 Score 98% Developer MicroProse Released 1998 Reviewed PCPP#33	FALCON 4.0 Realism and thrills in a flight experience delivered in spades by the long-awaited sequel in the Falcon franchise. Freedom to custom missions and variety of play make Falcon 4.0 a victory!	
54	Score 89% Developer Shiny Entertainment Released 2000 Reviewed PCPP#48	MESSIAH A saviour in nappies? Unlikely, but a cause for some great roleplaying - literally. Yet another great title that stretches our conception of what a gaming experience can be.	
53	 Score 89% Developer Particle Systems Released 1998 Reviewed PCPP#21	I-WAR Brought realism to the space sim genre. A delight due to well-designed missions and topped off by a great intro and cutscenes. Outer space action that felt like it.	
52	Score 90% Developer Maxis Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#35	SIM CITY 3000 Who imagined that town planning would make good gaming? Some maniac obviously. This is the newest and most user-friendly iteration yet of a great original idea.	
51	 Score 85% Developer Attention To Detail Released 2000 Reviewed PCPP#52	SYDNEY 2000 The spirit of Summer Games et al, lives on in this highly accessible sports title. Thrill to the high jump, thrust groin in the weight lifting, make a fool of yourself in the diving.	


Score 90% Developer Empire Released 1998 Reviewed PCPP#33	BIG RACE USA PRO PINBALL Far and away the finest pinball simulation ever for the PC. Loads of character and an AWESOME soundtrack means this isn't just for the pinball sim freaks - it's an effortlessly fun game full-stop.	 50
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	HEAVY GEAR 2 Originally the rip-off kids for Mechwarrior's concept, this second Heavy Gear title proved to be far superior. Fast-paced action in damn big machinery - how can you lose?	Score 93% Developer Activision Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#40	49
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Score NA Developer Origin Systems Released 1992 Reviewed NA	ULTIMA VII: THE BLACK GATE The pinnacle of the Ultima series? A contentious issue but this is definitely one of the finest of the series, with its strong narrative, excellent visuals and satisfying characters.	 48
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	FLIGHT UNLIMITED III A most visually stunning flight sim: from the recreation of Seattle and physical features to the weather conditions, flying was never so pretty. Immersion through eye candy and detailed physics.	Score 89% Developer Looking Glass Studios Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#43	47
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Score NA Developer LucasArts Released 1993 Reviewed NA	DAY OF THE TENTACLE Close to ten years old, this is still one of the funniest and finest examples of adventure gaming. Forget treasure hunting, you'll be too busy laughing your arse off.	 46
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	MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2 For a racing game, you spend an awful lot of time in the air! The original was impressive but this is just ridiculous - obscenely accessible riding and the choice of tracks is plain astonishing.	Score 86% Developer Rainbow Studios Released 2000 Reviewed PCPP#51	45
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Score 93% Developer Digital Anvil Released 2000 Reviewed PCPP#49	STARLANCER The Roberts have done good again! Gloriously classy space sim without an alien invasion, this is an incredibly immersive space combat simulation with a great narrative to boot.	 44
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	RAINBOW SIX: ROGUE SPEAR The sequel to Rainbow Six showed strong improvement in all areas of play. The tactical thrills with longevity is something that all squad based action games should boast.	Score 92% Developer Red Storm Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#44	43
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Score 91% Developer LucasArts Released 1998 Reviewed PCPP#31	GRIM FANDANGO Like DOTT some places back, this is another landmark in Lucasarts adventuring. A funny, beautiful game with loads of real heart. A tear of nostalgia should be welling in your eye about now, carnal.	 42
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	MIG ALLEY One of the more challenging flight sims, that combines gripping airborne combat with strategy and planning elements. Persistence rewards the patient gamer because this is a winner.	Score 92% Developer Rowan Software Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#42	41
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FREESTYLE


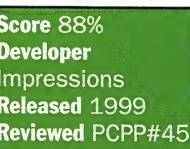


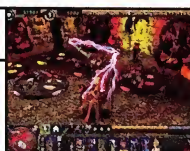
Up to the blocks now, for the fifteen hundred... an impressive line up. Rogue Spear and Heavy Gear 2 are definitely at a disadvantage, with all of that... machinery. Manny Calavera is as slim as ever, looking good. Here's the start... And they're away!










40	Score 83%	WORMS ARMAGEDDON	
	Developer Team 17		
	Released 1999		
	Reviewed PCPP#36		
The third instalment of Worms was ultimately far superior to its predecessors. The greater variety of hilarious weapons and balance in play make this a turn-based classic.			


39		PHAROAH		
				Score 88%
				Developer Impressions
				Released 1999
A truly impressive strategy/management title from Sierra, eerily similar to Caesar III. No matter, it is most certainly an improvement and an outstanding game therefore.				
Reviewed PCPP#45				



38	Score 90%	DUNGEON KEEPER 2	
	Developer Bullfrog		
	Released 1999		
	Reviewed PCPP#41		
A wicked twist on the gold plundering antics of noble kings and evil devils, m'Lud. Gives you the chance to fight the bad fight and manage your minions with a demon named Horny (errrh...).			


37		TWINSEN'S ODYSSEY		
				Score 84%
				Developer Adeline
				Released 1997
An action adventure with a unique style all its own. The cutesy visuals belied the quality of Twinsen's second Little Big Adventure romp. A title from the heyday of adventure games.				
Reviewed PCPP#15				

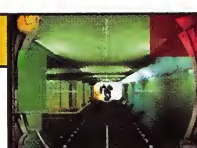
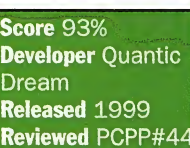
36	Score 88%	STARSIEGE TRIBES	
	Developer Dynamix		
	Released 1999		
	Reviewed PCPP#35		
The quintessential multiplayer FPS. No other title gives the goods in team-based action and strategy, from the classing of your troops and ease of control - this was always going to be a winner.			

35		DARK REIGN 2		
				Score 89%
				Developer Pandemic
				Released 2000
The original Dark Reign rocked with the exceptional AI of units and a great sci-fi design ethic. In the sequel, you have a classy RTS and a full 3D engine implemented to spectacular effect.				
Reviewed PCPP#51				

34	Score 91%	TOCA 2	
	Developer Codemasters		
	Released 1998		
	Reviewed PCPP#37		
A winner for the gamers as well as the racers. Stunning visuals, high speed driving that was above all fun made this a favourite for enthusiasts and casual racers alike.			

33		HIDDEN & DANGEROUS		
				Score 88%
				Developer Illusion Softworks
				Released 1999
The WW2 firstperson tactical event. Loads of challenging scenarios, high level of customisation and an interface to dream of (well almost) mean that H&D is involving and thrilling.				
Reviewed PCPP#41				

32	Score 92%	IMPERIUM GALACTICA 2	
	Developer Digital Reality		
	Released 2000		
	Reviewed PCPP#46		
Incredibly in-depth strategy title that has it all: more combat, trade and diplomacy than you can poke a stick at. The mediocre original is no match for this modern day classic.			

31		OMIKRON: NOMAD SOUL		
				Score 93%
				Developer Quantic Dream
				Released 1999
A sterling example of developers stretching the boundaries of what constitutes a game. Genre-defying does no justice to this action, roleplaying, adventure epic that did it all and well.				
Reviewed PCPP#44				

HORNY

So you are interested in gold?



Yes, as a means to defile the world.



Score 82% Developer Probe Studios Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#41	RE-VOLT Remote Controlled mayhem. A favourite due to its enormous appeal as a multiplayer vehicle (laughs aplenty). It goes to show that FUN games can be far more enjoyable than COMPLEX games.	 30
	ENEMY ENGAGED: COMANCHE VS. HOKUM Helicopter sim that fans of the genre have been waiting for. Fantastic attention to detail with the chance to customise to either side of difficult makes this the new heli-sim for everyone.	Score 91% Developer Razorworks Released 2000 Reviewed PCPP#50 29
Score 9/10 Developer Geoff Crammond/Micro Prose Released '96 Reviewed PCPP#1	GRAND PRIX 2 The old guard holds up even today; this is surely the strongest F1 game of all time. The perilous balance between good gameplay and realism for aficionados done effortlessly.	 28
	BATTLEZONE An example of the original being the best. The perfect mix of action and strategy that was nothing like you'd seen at the time. Sadly, its sequel didn't bring anything new to the table.	Score 90% Developer Pandemic Released 1998 Reviewed PCPP#20 27
Score 89% Developer SirTech Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#42	JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 Extraordinary mix of roleplaying elements and turn-based strategy to great effect. High level of detail and large helpings of atmosphere make this one tactical event not to be missed.	 26
	ULTIMA UNDERWORLD: THE STYGIAN ABYSS Landmark of RPG history. Considering its release in the early 1990s, a firstperson perspective and a 3D engine make this a pioneer. Add to this the stunning narrative and you have a classic.	Score NA Developer Blue Sky Productions Released 1992 Reviewed NA 25
Score 95% Developer Volition Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#44	FREESPACE 2 The space sim reborn in all of its mind-blowing, atmospheric glory. Add to this a cracker of a storyline and unbelievable visuals and you have a damn good reason to own a PC.	 24
	STARCRAFT The prototype for the modern realtime strategy. A jack of all trades, offering an exceptional range of play in three distinct races. Starship Troopers and Aliens for the PC strategist.	Score 92% Developer Blizzard Released 1998 Reviewed PCPP#25 23
Score 90% Developer Sierra Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#46	SWAT3 Intense and involving squad based shooter with stunning visuals, high flexibility in play, some of the best AI ever seen and audio to marvel at. One of Sierra's best!	 22
	THE LAST EXPRESS The most innovative adventure title to date. An intriguing and dense game with non-linear gameplay, great dialogue, a compelling storyline and bucket loads of style, this is truly satisfying adventure gaming.	Score 88% Developer Smoking Car Released 1997 Reviewed PCPP#13 21

HOCKEY



Team sports really bring out the best in competitive spirit here at Sydney 2000. Who will prevail? The regimented SWAT3 or Jagged Alliance 2, or the tight knit band of Battlezone. Surely The Last Express doesn't have that team mentality so essential to this sport. Mind the shins, Olympians.





RC TYCOON vs AVP



Two very different styles of boxing here - you don't often see a bawling, drooling savage in a boxing ring. And the Alien looks pretty angry too... oh, he's used the tail - he's fast, isn't he? Oh, it's a she... oh look the little battler's thrown up on the Alien. Brave, brave...



20	Score 92% Developer Creative Assembly Released 2000 Reviewed PCPP#50	SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR The epitome of complex, immersive, tactical warfare following the dictates of Sun Tzu himself. Large scale strategy war just begging to be presented to the modern war gamer.	
19		GP500 The only motorcycle racing title that cuts the mustard. With thrilling racing action for the novice as well as the expert, this is a certified winner. Go Microprose!	Score 96% Developer Melbourne House Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#43
18	Score 92% Developer MicroProse Released 1996 Reviewed PCPP#10	MASTER OF ORION II A strategy powerhouse that offered the freedom in planning and production that its contemporaries failed to. The finest space strategy of its day.	
17		ALIENS VS PREDATOR With subject matter like this, how could it possibly fail? Begging for an FPS version, the Aliens and Predators presented an intriguing balance to the traditional marine action hero. Game over, man!	Score 96% Developer Rebellion Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#37
16	Score 88% Developer Black Isle Studios Released 1998 Reviewed PCPP#32	FALLOUT 2 An example of what Black Isle Studios has always done well - the traditional RPG. Impressively large post-holocaust environs mean almost endless gaming! Improved much on the original.	
15		JANE'S FA/18 HORNET The switch to a more accessible style of game from hardcore stable Jane's paid off. This is a technically realistic fighter sim, that drips high class quality gameplay.	Score 91% Developer Jane's Released 2000 Reviewed PCPP#47
14	Score 93% Developer MicroProse Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#36	ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON Rollercoasters are perhaps the peak of Western civilisation to date. So it makes sense that a sleek and well-designed game about building them would be a remarkable success. This is it.	
13		GRAND PRIX LEGENDS Simply a stunning example of racing simulation. The extreme attention to detail makes this the finest racing title available. Critics maintain that it's too hard - but they always do, don't they?	Score 95% Developer Papyrus Released 1998 Reviewed PCPP#30
12	Score 94% Developer Epic Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#45	UNREAL TOURNAMENT Proof that id software don't own the FPS genre. Compelling action with great variety in weaponry, secondary fire options and customisable to the extreme, UT is first class gaming.	
11		CIVILIZATION II The Godfather of turn-based strategy. An anthology of good game design and a compulsory part of any serious gamer's heritage. Still whips the pants off its imitators - and successors.	Score 9/10 Developer MicroProse Released 1996 Reviewed PCPP#1

GROUND CONTROL

Score
90%
Developer
Massive
Entertainment
Released
2000
Reviewed
PCPP#52

3D realtime strategy for the new millennium. Awesomely accessible interface and a game design that allows some of the most specific control over units ever. The authentic implementation of tactics makes this a must. The visuals are superb and the camera controls extremely functional. The next step in strategy gaming.



10

X A E R O



I have reached the pinnacle of symmetry between my mind, body and actions. My actions are one. Whether it be with a rocket launcher or bounce pad, I jump with precision, I jump with power and with my bald head I am just about the most gorgeous creature on the planet.



QUAKE 3 ARENA

9

What can you say about the phenomenon that is Q3A? Well, it made deathmatching extremely accessible to newbies without sacrificing quality, thereby maintaining its strong fan-base. It offers the fastest, most furious online experience yet for the action gamer. It's got slick quality maps and an extremely well balanced array of weaponry. It's the social sport of our time... Anything else?

Score
93%
Developer
id Software
Released
1999
Reviewed
PCPP#45

THE SIMS

Score
90%
Developer
Maxis
Released
2000
Reviewed
PCPP#47

One of the most ambitious undertakings ever in PC gaming. Playing god in domestic lives seems a bit tame when compared to playing god in a fantasy realm, but The Sims offered a social experiment for all of us. Who didn't try torturing their Sims? Wonder why nothing good happened when you WEREN'T torturing your Sims? Intriguing and addictive.



8



HALF-LIFE

7

Gordon Freeman's adventures in Black Mesa make for some of the most compelling first person action around. A refreshingly compelling example of the genre, you are placed in a horribly realistic situation of alien invasion. Ammo conservation, suffering under a government cover-up and featuring the most effective setpieces in FPS history mean Half-Life is a bona fide classic.

Score
98%
Developer
Valve Software
Released
1998
Reviewed
PCPP#31

SYSTEM SHOCK II

Score
98%
Developer
Irrational Games
Released
1999
Reviewed
PCPP#42

The follow-up to an original so distant and folkloric in gaming history was always going to be hard. But Irrational Games blew it all open with this masterful sequel - a roleplaying, action, strategy firstperson event. All the situations you faced could be negotiated in any number of ways and, oh yeah, this is one of the scariest games in memory.



6



Seeya Malky!



5 HOMEWORLD



The 2001 of space sims. Relic placed the space combat simulation into 3D space so effectively that the gamers of the world realised what it was to play with a z-axis. A cleverly simplistic and well-integrated interface made manoeuvring a fleet in space entirely possible if not quite effortless. Also, Homeworld gave us a powerful narrative of a people searching for home and more style than any one game should. And what a stunningly beautiful game is Homeworld. Sure there are nebula effects, but what about the subtle lighting, the ever-so convincing movements of craft, the music, and the calm to the point of sublime voice of the Mothership. A glimpse at the future of games let alone the RTS.

Score 95% Developer Relic Entertainment Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#41

4 THIEF I & II

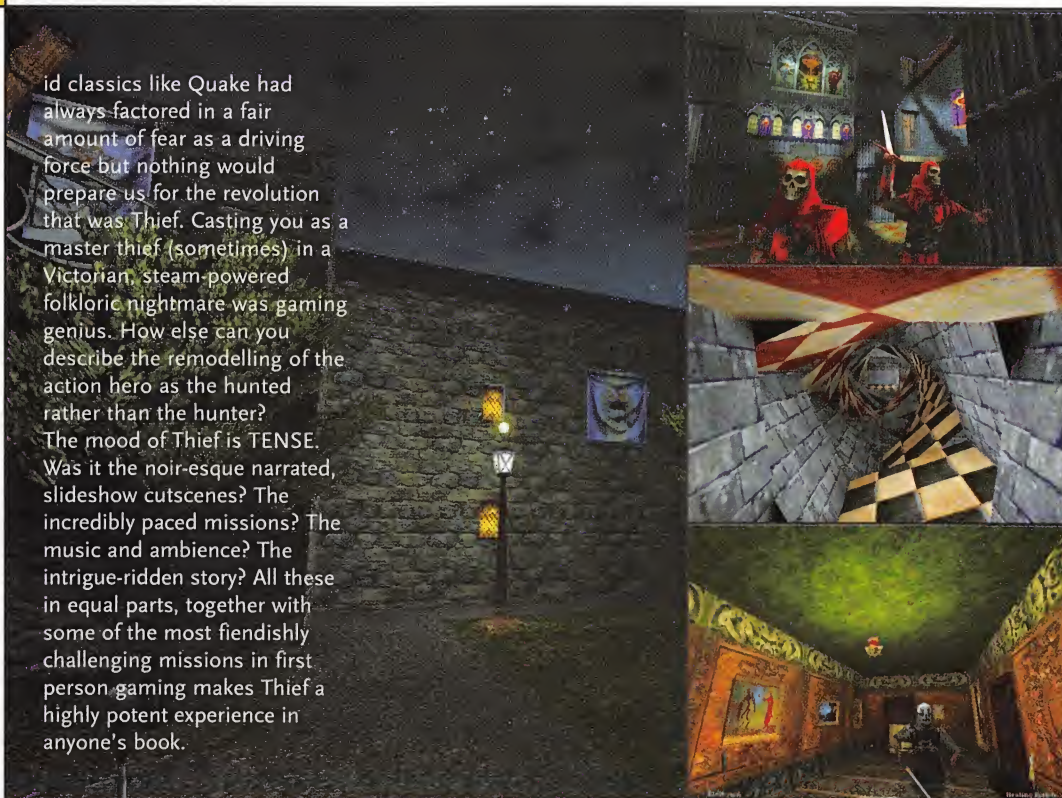
GARRETT

With theft as a spectators sport for the first time here in Sydney, you must be proud to be here. Hey! Where's my watch!



Always happy to get some practise in.

id classics like Quake had always factored in a fair amount of fear as a driving force but nothing would prepare us for the revolution that was Thief. Casting you as a master thief (sometimes) in a Victorian, steam-powered folkloric nightmare was gaming genius. How else can you describe the remodelling of the action hero as the hunted rather than the hunter? The mood of Thief is TENSE. Was it the noir-esque narrated, slideshow cutscenes? The incredibly paced missions? The music and ambience? The intrigue-ridden story? All these in equal parts, together with some of the most fiendishly challenging missions in first person gaming makes Thief a highly potent experience in anyone's book.



Score 95% Developer Looking Glass Studios Released 1998 Reviewed PCPP#33

AGE OF EMPIRES II: AGE OF KINGS

3



The pinnacle of realtime strategy gaming as we know it. Covering all of the bases is a good way to make a high quality game and this is just what Ensemble Studios has done. Here you have more than a dozen different races to choose from (who are customised by their vocals amongst other things); historically accurate missions featuring famous figures like Joan

of Arc; as well as the chance to manage and expand your empire.

On top of that, add a fantastic interface and all the trimmings in the form of very fine sound and music. This is all necessary when you consider that the missions are almost obscenely long. An epic in EVERY sense of the word.

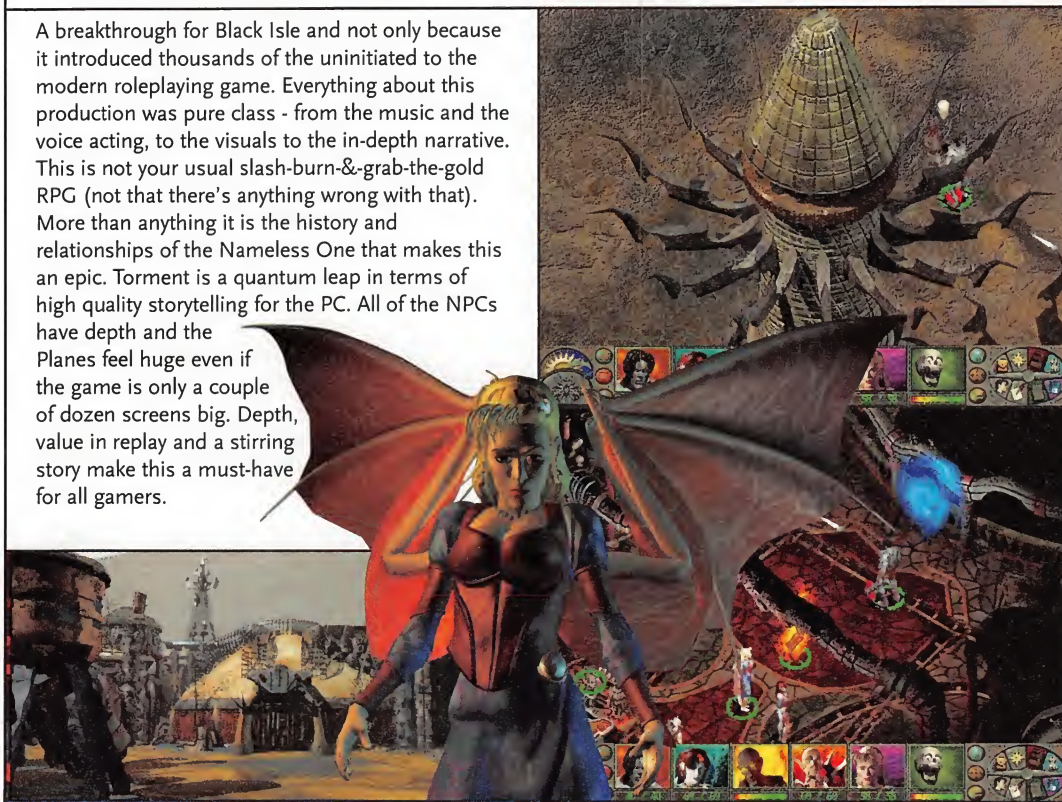
Score 94% Developer Ensemble Studios Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#42



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

2

A breakthrough for Black Isle and not only because it introduced thousands of the uninitiated to the modern roleplaying game. Everything about this production was pure class - from the music and the voice acting, to the visuals to the in-depth narrative. This is not your usual slash-burn-&-grab-the-gold RPG (not that there's anything wrong with that). More than anything it is the history and relationships of the Nameless One that makes this an epic. Torment is a quantum leap in terms of high quality storytelling for the PC. All of the NPCs have depth and the Planes feel huge even if the game is only a couple of dozen screens big. Depth, value in replay and a stirring story make this a must-have for all gamers.



Score 91% Developer Black Isle Studios Released 1999 Reviewed PCPP#46

NAMELESS ONE



The 100m requires the utmost concentration, strength and passion. Someone once asked me, "What can change the nature of a man?" I was never sure but I DO know that anabolic steroids well and truly change the nature of a woman. Look at some of these wildebeasts!

1 DEUS EX



If circumstances conspired to exile us to a remote desert island with naught but a solar-powered PC, we know which game we'd take.

Deus Ex is all about unprecedented freedom and a level of immersion surpassing that of any other game. Its twisted plot, brimming with conspiracies insidious enough to rival anything dreamed up by Chris Carter, is truly the stuff of nightmares. And the seemingly limitless array of ways to achieve mission goals gives the player the impression that they're engaged in a whole new game, whether starting it for the first time or the fifteenth. An ability to customise character skills and attributes also allows

the player to select the areas in which they specialise - from sniper to hacker to demolition expert. But those choices are just the tip of the vocational iceberg. This makes it possible for bloodthirsty types to go about their business with abandon, and allows pacifists to achieve their objectives using more subtle means.

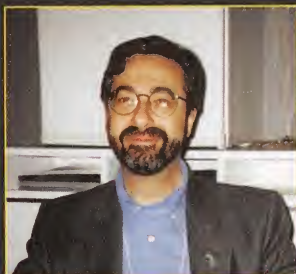
However, every action within Deus Ex's expansive environments has far-reaching consequences, making it seem like the player is ensconced within a living, breathing world. There's never been a more compelling reason to call in sick or take that annual leave. Deus Ex, you are the best game ever.



Score 98% Developer Ion Storm Released 2000 Reviewed PCPP#51

CONGRATULATIONS!

LET'S HAVE A WORD WITH THE WINNER...



When we informed Ion Storm's Warren Spector, the Project Director of Deus Ex, that his game had just been crowned the best game ever, he was lost for words. But not too lost, obviously.

"Well, it isn't often I find myself speechless, but this is one of those times," he said,

after recovering from the shock. "The Deus Ex team worked incredibly hard to make as good a game as we possibly could, but I don't think any of us expected this kind of honour. Best game ever? Wow! A simple "thank you" hardly seems a sufficient response..."

So, come on, tell us how it feels to be part of the team that has created the best game ever?

"Proud, humble, exhilarated - tired!"

Why do you think Deus Ex is so good? Or, if you prefer, what is the game's greatest achievement?

"I think the coolest thing about the game is that we achieved our primary goal, a goal we set for ourselves when we started pre-production. Deus Ex *is* a game about creating a unique alter ego, and the choices you make about who you are in our gameworld are expressible, minute-to-minute, in gameplay. But possibly of greatest importance, the choices you make - in terms of character development and ingame actions - really do

make a difference. For a team to shoot so high and hit the mark is pretty awe-inspiring to me."

And why do you think it has met with such critical acclaim?

"Fundamentally, I think lots of gamers have been waiting for a game something like this - a game that's about *them* and not about some all-powerful, all-knowing designer. My friend, colleague and sometime mentor, Doug Church put it best when he said, "Games should be about getting the developers *off* the stage and the players *on* it."

"I couldn't agree more - and wish I'd been clever enough to put it half as well!. Deus Ex is a tiny little step in the direction lots of people hope gaming will go. And even a tiny little step is enough to generate a fair amount of enthusiasm and acclaim, apparently. Not that I'm complaining!"

Thanks Warren and, once again, congratulations!



BROKEN GLASS

HOW DID ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST ACCLAIMED DEVELOPMENT STUDIOS - A TEAM RESPONSIBLE FOR NO LESS THAN FOUR OF OUR TOP 100 GAMES - FALL INTO FINANCIAL RUIN? **JAMES STERRETT** INVESTIGATES.



* We've all been shocked and saddened by the sudden demise of Looking Glass. It seemed that Looking Glass was riding high, with System Shock 2 and the Thief series finally getting it the public acclaim and sales Looking Glass has always deserved. Suddenly, Looking Glass turned out to be dead. Why did this occur? The more I have learnt about this, the more complex the answer has become - it goes right to the heart of the relationship between publisher and developer in today's games industry.

However, the quick answer is this:

Looking Glass died because a series of problems compounded each other into a financially lethal situation. No single factor is to blame. No single person or entity killed Looking Glass. No one problem was enough, on its own, to kill the company. Nonetheless, the problems were deadly when combined.

Risky business

A hard fact of the world is that software development companies are rarely in a very good financial situation. The company enters a contract with a publisher to produce a specific game with a given set of features. The contract usually specifies that the publisher will provide the developer with money when they achieve agreed-upon milestones in the construction of the game. If the developer fails to achieve a milestone before the previous dollop of cash runs out,

needs a much larger infusion of cash than a smaller, single-project company. The risk involved is reduced, but the consequences are worse when things turn sour.

Hits and misses

All in all, producing games is not for the risk-averse. Lots of things can go wrong. Many game projects never get to the point of being sold. Many of those that are sold do not make enough money to repay the cost of their production. Since the games cost several

systems, and at least one original console game: John Madden '93 for the Sega Genesis, which sold over one million copies and was their greatest single hit.

Of all these, most were successes. Terra Nova was a disaster, not least because Looking Glass decided to publish on its own. Exactly why Terra Nova failed on the market is not clear. Possibly the gaming public saw it as a Mechwarrior clone and thus ignored it. If Terra Nova had been a success, this would have allowed

VAST AMOUNTS OF MONEY ARE SPENT IN THE HOPES THAT A FEW GAMES WILL SELL WELL

they have to find more money, or go out of business. Getting more money almost inevitably means borrowing it in some manner. This leaves the producer with a debt to pay off in the future, thus reducing the net profit from royalties - payments the producer gets as a percentage of the publisher's profit from sales of the game - once the game is finished. Those royalties are only a small fraction of the actual revenue gained by sales of the game, and, furthermore, the payments the producer got during development are considered as advances against the royalties.

As a result, the developers are in a bind: they have to make a very complex product, on a tight schedule. If the schedule slips - and, because of the complexity of the product, the schedules nearly always do - the developer begins to get into trouble.

One of the ways that a developer can reduce their exposure to this risk is to have several projects running at once on an offset release schedule. If all goes very well, each product's royalties then provide the operating expenses to get later products through their troubles. If one product fails to make money, the revenue stream from the others cushions the company from the blow. A developer needs to have a minimum of three or four active projects for this to work.

Inevitably, there are some catches in this plan. The biggest catch is that nothing guarantees the income cushion: no game is guaranteed to do well. If several games fail to do well at once, the scale of trouble is proportionately worse. It takes a large company to conduct multiple projects at once. Thus, when the company does have to search for extra funding, it

millions of dollars to produce, and more millions to publish, a lot of copies have to be sold just to break even. Consider that Thief II cost US\$2.5 million to develop, and probably, at the very least, another million to publish (and probably more). At a price of US\$40 per box, it needs to sell a minimum of 87,500 copies just to break even. And at 100,000 copies sold the profit margin is still only half a million dollars, which isn't enough to fund the next game.

Keep in mind that this doesn't all mean that the publishers are the evil villains of the game industry for failing to support obviously good companies and ditching the bad ones, and for failing to split the profits equitably with the producers. Publishers are, in fact, in the same binds as the producers, except on a much larger monetary scale. Bigger publishers are better able to offset losses with a few hits, which is why there are so few publishers around: most of them have died or been bought up.

The entire computer games industry is high-risk. Vast amounts of money are spent in the hopes that a few games will sell well enough to make up for the losses incurred on all the others. When we look at things in this light, Looking Glass was actually a remarkably successful and long-lived independent developer. It survived all of these pressures for eleven years and produced at least twelve titles: Ultima Underworld I & II, System Shock I & II, Terra Nova, British Open Championship Golf, Flight Unlimited I, II, & III plus a Windows '95 version of Flight Unlimited I, Thief I & II, Thief Gold, and, if the bankers permit it, Jane's Attack Squadron. In addition, Looking Glass did conversions of various PC games to console

Looking Glass to reap far greater profits, as they had done with the self-published Flight Unlimited. When Terra Nova was a commercial disaster (despite selling over 100,000 copies), Looking Glass was left holding all the publication debt. Looking Glass might have folded at this juncture, but was bailed out by Averstar, Inc.

Mergers and closures

Terra Nova would have killed most companies. Looking Glass, probably because of its previous string of successful titles, was able to find creditors and stay afloat, but in debt. Over the next several years, the company appears to have led a troubled existence. Nonetheless, Looking Glass nearly died again in 1997. British Open Championship Golf experienced a difficult birth, and then bombed when released, as a third self-published game, in the spring of 1997. The company saved itself, in part by closing a studio in Austin set up by Warren Spector. While it reduced overhead, this closure was a serious loss. Not only did it cost Looking Glass staff who were important to ongoing projects, such as Thief, but the team involved comprised no small net talent: many of that team formed the group now completing Deus Ex. Moreover, the stress of not knowing if the office would be open from day to day caused many of the Looking Glass staff to leave, slowing projects while replacements were found and trained. In and around all these troubles, a project for a Star Trek: Voyager game foundered and eventually died. All told, Looking Glass incurred a significant quantity of long-term debt in this period, though it improved its financial situation at the end of the summer through a merger with Infometrics, a subsidiary of Averstar.

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

A DECADE OF GAMING INNOVATION

1989

Work began on the game that was to become Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss. When it was released through Origin in 1992,



Underworld was the first game to convincingly portray a 3D world with texture-mapping, varied architecture, and the ability to look up and down. Looking Glass had shown its hand: immersive reality simulators had arrived.

1993

Underworld II: The Labyrinth of Worlds followed shortly after. As with most sequels, it refined



the original's gameplay while adding numerous technical improvements. A larger view window highlighted the impressive diversity of the eponymous Worlds.

1994

With a fullscreen 3D engine, deep roleplaying system and complex object interaction, System Shock was the original "thinking man's shooter". It also featured the thinking



man's sex symbol, too. Shodan was an ingenious arch-enemy - ever-present, seemingly untouchable, and genuinely chilling.

1995

Looking Glass' answer to MS Flight Simulator, the Flight

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS



Unlimited series may not have had its rival's sheer size, but it was a hell of a lot more fun. The hallmarks of the series were evident from the beginning: its realistic (for its time) flight dynamics pleased sim fans, while the small scale yet extremely detailed environments provided much atmosphere.

1996

A squad-based mech-style tactical action game, Terra Nova



never really got the attention its quality deserved. Part of the reason for this was that it looked a bit too similar to Mechwarrior 2 - though it played very differently. The other factor was that, as a self-publisher, Looking Glass was not in a strong enough position to hype or market it effectively.

1997

British Open Championship Golf and Flight Unlimited II surfaced during '97, in what



was probably the team's lowest point. Both titles fared well with fans, but struggled to match past successes. The fact that we've played neither of them should speak volumes. About the games, that is.

Yet Looking Glass survived. Flight Unlimited II appeared late in 1997 and eventually broke even. Nonetheless, the debt incurred in this period - from Terra Nova through Flight Unlimited II - comprises the precondition for Looking Glass' eventual demise. If all went well, it could control the debt, pay it off, and survive. If trouble occurred, it was not as well-placed financially to deal with it.

Thief in the night

Thief appeared in late 1998 and was a major hit, eventually making millions of dollars for Looking Glass. Had Thief not been a big hit, Looking Glass would almost certainly have folded. Instead, Thief appeared to revitalise the company. Thief Gold sold well, and System Shock II sales were passable. Thief

The multiple project system depends on each product coming out essentially on schedule. Since Flight Combat went over time, Looking Glass was not only losing money on the project, but also failing to get the income from it that was supposed to support its other projects.

In theory, multiple offset projects allows the developer to survive a failure. Thief was profit that plugged holes in short-term debt. System Shock II more or less offset the failure of Flight Unlimited III. Flight Combat was thus a financial problem that strained the multiple project system and put Looking Glass in danger again, and cash in hand began to run critically low in early autumn of 1999, despite the royalties coming in from Thief (in

unhappy that Irrational would not be involved in the manner originally intended. Despite negotiations, Microsoft pulled out of the deal in February 2000.

This apparently subtracted at least one million dollars from the cash that Looking Glass had expected to use to cover its operating expenses. In other words, the failure of this contract could be a mortal threat to Looking Glass if its finances were already in bad shape. Furthermore, had Irrational remained in the contract, a substantial fraction of the money from Microsoft would have gone to keeping Irrational afloat, instead of to Looking Glass.

Thus, Flight Combat's cost overruns, earlier debts, the failure of Flight Unlimited III, and the failure of the Deep Cover project

A DEAL WAS IN PROGRESS WITH SONY WHEN THEY HIT ECONOMIC TROUBLES

II is currently on the way to being an even bigger hit than Thief I. However, Flight Unlimited III (released in 1999) sold quite poorly and ate the gains from System Shock II due to an agreement with Electronic Arts to pay off advances for both projects with the royalties from both projects.

Furthermore, there is extensive circumstantial evidence that Thief's success, great though it was, may have done little more than plug the holes that debt had left in Looking Glass' budget. Thief ensured that, if all went well, Looking Glass could survive 1999 and 2000. Unfortunately, a series of problems came together, and ensured that a lot of things went very badly wrong.

The fourth game in the Flight Unlimited series, Flight Combat, ran well over schedule. Worse, Flight Combat (Janes' Attack Squadron) was knowingly undersold to Electronic Arts: Looking Glass apparently gambled that it could get the game out the door faster than the budget actually called for. The gamble failed: Flight Combat was instead slower than the planned budget, in part because of a major redesign insisted on by Electronic Arts. This redesign appears not to have been accompanied by a sufficient change in the budget and schedule for Flight Combat.

addition to, presumably, milestone payments for Thief Gold.)

Irrational deals

Work began in early 1999 on a modern-day stealth-based game called "Deep Cover". This was a joint project with Irrational, similar to the System Shock 2 project. Looking Glass was to provide a version of the Dark Engine while Irrational would provide the bulk of the game design. Unfortunately, finding a publisher for this project took nine months.

As a result, Looking Glass' cash shortage began to catch up with it. Payments to Irrational were affected, placing Irrational in danger of extinction. As a result, Irrational informed Looking Glass that it was looking for other work, and eventually found it in November 1999 in the form of a contract for a PlayStation 2 game. Shortly after Irrational signed onto its new project, Looking Glass came to an agreement with Microsoft to publish Deep Cover in conjunction with Irrational - but Irrational felt it had to pull out of the Deep Cover project to honour its own recently-signed contract elsewhere.

The rights and materials to Deep Cover reverted to Looking Glass, and Looking Glass was allowed to continue to hire the services of the Deep Cover design team from Irrational. Microsoft, however, was

with Irrational and Microsoft, all combined to leave Looking Glass in a perilous condition.

Looking Glass sought new sources of funding. In particular, it tried to get itself bought by a company with enough resources to keep Looking Glass solvent.

A deal was in progress with Sony when they hit economic troubles. Sony reorganised, and the executive who had been in charge of the deal with Looking Glass was replaced. The replacement canned the deal, terminating this possible rescue.

Eidos then stepped into the breach and firmly intended to buy Looking Glass, presumably intending to protect their projected income stream from Thief II Gold, Thief III and other potential future projects such as Deep Cover. The deal was agreed upon, and, while the paperwork was processed, Eidos began to keep Looking Glass afloat. It seemed that Looking Glass had been saved.

However, the economic instability sweeping the entertainment industry slammed into Eidos, which found itself with insufficient funds to complete the purchase. Eidos asked its bankers for more money. The bank was itself in a period of difficulty, and thus the bankers said no.

Left with only enough cash in hand to pay off its employees,

Looking Glass was then forced to shut down.

Snowballing events

Looking Glass had a long run; it survived eleven years in a business where all too many companies have a lifespan a cicada would not envy. It consistently produced superb games - most of which were commercial successes - in an industry where many games are second rate and many fail to make a profit. It repeatedly survived disasters that would have killed most companies. All in all, Looking Glass was a spectacular success as a games producer.

But the games industry is a high-risk environment of speculative capital. Looking Glass beat the odds for eleven years. Eventually, the odds caught up with it.

As mentioned before: no one factor killed Looking Glass. A number of attempts have been made to blame various single parties. While all of these accusations have a small grain of truth, all of them fail to appreciate the wider picture. To debunk some of the more prevalent myths:

* Eidos did not kill Looking Glass. True, the final word came from Eidos. However, Eidos was deeply involved in trying to keep Looking Glass afloat. Blaming Eidos is like claiming that a drowning victim was killed by the person who attempted the resuscitation.

* Eidos' bankers did not kill Looking Glass. True, the final blow was dealt by Eidos' bankers. But without an enormous chain of events beforehand at Looking Glass, Eidos' bankers would never have been involved. If Eidos itself had not hit financial trouble, the bankers would not have been involved. Had the bank been in good shape, there is a good chance it would have approved the rescue.

* John Romero did not kill Looking Glass. True enough, Eidos' finances might have been much healthier if Daikatana had been on schedule and on budget. But Romero's flaws would have had no bearing on Looking Glass' survival, if Looking Glass had not already been in deep trouble for its own reasons - including games that went over time and over budget.

* Irrational did not kill Looking Glass. True, pulling out of the

Deep Cover contract hurt Looking Glass. But this single failure could not have been mortal without the severe problems that already existed in Looking Glass' budget.

* Flight Combat did not kill Looking Glass. True, the cost and schedule overruns were very harmful, and the cost gamble turned sour. Yet without the other problems that came before and during this project, it would not have been lethal.

* Poor sales of Thief did not kill Looking Glass. This hasn't even a grain of truth. Thief sold well and, according to Tim Stellmach (Lead Designer on Thief), Looking Glass made millions of dollars from it. If Thief had failed to be a hit, Looking Glass would have died. Instead, Thief kept the company going.

* Poor sales of System Shock II and Flight Unlimited III did not kill Looking Glass. Obviously, better sales would have helped. Flight Unlimited III was not a success. However, System Shock II did not sell poorly and, according to Stellmach, should break even or better in the long term.

* Neither Terra Nova, nor the Austin studio, nor Star Trek: Voyager, nor British Open Championship Golf, nor even Elvis killed Looking Glass. Looking Glass survived the worst moments of all of these. True, the damage these caused helped to drag it down in the end. But the damage itself was insufficient to actually cause Looking Glass to keel over.

Survival is success

So what can we blame? If you must blame something, blame the system as a whole. The games industry is extremely volatile. Millions of dollars must be spent to design, test, and manufacture a product, and as often as not the products fail to repay that investment. The whims of the buying public are quite difficult to predict. Companies whose products fail to pay off rarely get a second chance, because nobody is in the business to lose money.

Looking Glass, in retrospect, did a stunningly good job in this harsh environment. If we discount the Win95 version of Flight Unlimited, Thief: Gold, and its console conversions, it produced 11 titles in about 11 years. Of these, three were commercial failures

(Terra Nova, British Open Championship Golf, and Flight Unlimited III), and another one might fail to break even (System Shock II has not yet broken even, but is expected to do so). Two thirds of its titles were commercial successes. Some of its titles are legendary as creative achievements; all have received critical acclaim.

That's no mean feat. Surviving for a decade, through shocks that would have killed lesser companies, without compromising its design principles, and producing many of the greatest games ever to grace a computer, is a legacy to be proud of. While we may be saddened by its death, we should also be grateful that Looking Glass had the tenacity and agility to survive so long.

Finally, the Looking Glass legacy does not prove that deep, complex gameplay is a recipe for market failure. If that were the case, Looking Glass would have died long ago. Ultima Underworld would be cult hit known to few, instead of consistently being praised as a seminal computer game. Thief and Thief II would not have been hits. If anything, Looking Glass' long survival proves that deep, complex, immersive gameplay tends to be commercially successful.

Only one of Looking Glass' clear-cut money losers, Terra Nova, resides in its "core competence" of first-person action-adventure titles. The other two major commercial failures - Flight Unlimited III and British Open Championship Golf - went head to head with established powerhouse titles (Microsoft Flight Simulator and Links, respectively) on those title's home turf. That's a daunting and risky course of action, and in both cases it failed to pan out. Arguably, Terra Nova suffered from the same fate, being seen as a "big robot game" and thus a competitor to Mechwarrior. By contrast, Ultima Underworld, System Shock, Flight Unlimited I, and Thief all broke new ground and were rewarded for it.

In other words, where Looking Glass innovated most, it did best commercially. This, and Looking Glass' longevity, strongly suggests that in the long run, good innovative games are good profitable business.

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS



1998

Thief: The Dark Project was released. A revolution of Industrial proportions, Thief redefined the gameplay lexicon by making the avoidance of confrontation equally exciting as tackling opponents head on. The game's sterling achievements in audio also merit immense praise.

1999

Developed in conjunction with Irrational Games (most of whom were former Looking Glass people, anyway), the



sequel to System Shock surpassed most fans' dizzying expectations. Shock 2 remains a perfect blend of first-person action and roleplaying - and is still undoubtedly the scariest thing ever.

2000

Earlier this year came the dawn of the Metal Age - and with it, Looking Glass' final release. Thief II was forged from a more coherent vision than its predecessor; its designers crafted perhaps the most compelling and immersive game world yet seen. The irony being, of course, that despite arriving at the height of the team's power - Thief II is Looking Glass' most commercially successful game - it would also be its last. What a way to go, though...



NOTE: This is an edited version of an article that originally appeared at www.ttlg.com.

REVIEW CONTENTS

THE PCPP CREW

AND THEIR OLYMPIC DREAMS SHATTERED...



DAVID WILDGOOSE

What I'm playing:

Deus Ex, Perfect Dark, Sydney 2000

Have I ever cheated in a race?

Only the human race, my friend.



AGATA BUDINSKA

What I'm playing:

Too much of The Sims, Nomad Soul

Have I ever cheated in a race?

Race? What's a race?



MARCH STEPNIK

What I'm playing:

Gabriel Knight 3, Abe's Oddysee, Ultima Online

Have I ever cheated in a race?

I've never had to cheat.



MURRAY PHILBRICK

What I'm playing:

Deus Ex, MDK2, Rogue Spear

Have I ever cheated in a race?

Does feigning an injury to get out of it count?



BRETT ROBINSON

What I'm playing:

Ground Control, Kula World (PSX) and countless MP3s

Have I ever cheated in a race?

Yep. Cross Country short cuts through teacher-infested bushland were par for the course in high school.



EDWARD FOX

What I'm playing:

GP500, Superbikes 2000, Rally Masters, TOCA 2

Have I ever cheated in a race?

Never!



CHANTAL BAIRLE

What I'm playing:

Wipeout 3

Have I ever cheated in a race?

In fear of incriminating myself, I'll say no!



MAJOR DES MCNICHOLAS

What I'm playing:

Ground Control, Axis & Allies, Soldier of Fortune

Have I ever cheated in a race?

Only when I looked like losing.



ASHLEY MILLOTT

What I'm playing:

Tetris

Have I ever cheated in a race?

Cheaters never prosper... so yes.



RYAN HOVINGH

What I'm playing:

Still playing (sigh) Might and Magic VI.

Have I ever cheated in a race?

Taking hard-boiled eggs into the high school egg-race.



JOHN DEWHURST

What I'm playing:

Planescape Torment, Quake 3, Wilco

Have I ever cheated in a race?

I was never in any race where it mattered!
(That means yes.)



GEORGE SOROPOS

What I'm playing:

Pepsi Extreme Downhill Badminton

Have I ever cheated in a race?

Only by using drugs that are available over the counter from any veterinarian.



CHRISTIAN READ

What I'm playing:

Icewind Dale, Imperium Galactica 2.

Have I ever cheated in a race?

No, but I did once cheat on your daddy with your momma.



MIKE WILCOX

What I'm playing:

Motorcross Madness 2, Evolva, Colin McRae Rally 2.0

Have I ever cheated in a race?

As a kid, yes... Nowadays if it involves more than a three button combo, I'm just not interested!



HUGH NORTON-SMITH

What I'm playing:

Pokemon Gold, Mishima Hiro's Firebird Parlor Wrestler IX, Double Shaft Explosion Highway III, Rush Feeling.

Have I ever cheated in a race?

Did you know that Adam's Ale is water?



HARRY MARAGOS

What I'm playing:

Mr Do, Soldier of Fortune.

Have I ever cheated in a race?

Only with the cheerleaders.



ISSUE 52 REVIEWS

72 Sydney 2000

We've said it once and we'll say it again - Bruce is a legend.

78 Ground Control

The sexiest realtime strategy game ever.

82 Vampire: The Masquerade

More goths than King St on a Saturday night.

86 Icewind Dale

It's not Baldur's Gate 2, but it's pretty close.

88 Daikatana

No comment.

90 MDK 2

Mmm... Donkey Kong? Okay, guys, we give up!

92 Mini Reviews

Alien Nations

Need For Speed: Porsche 2000

King of Dragon Pass

Maximum Flight



THE PCPP REVIEW SYSTEM

NEED: The bare minimum system requirements to get the game up and running at a playable speed. Don't even think about the game unless you have this system.

WANT: The ideal system requirements for the game. You can still play it well without this setup, but this will allow you to see the game as it was meant to be.

FOR: The major reasons why you'll like the reviewed game.
AGAINST: The major reasons why you won't. Read both and decide which seems the most appropriate and important to you.

95+

PLATINUM AWARD

A virtually flawless title, one that expands our gaming horizons while providing a supremely playable experience. The absolute best there is. Everyone will love this game.



94-90

GOLD AWARD

A classic. Either an unquestionable example of superiority within its genre or a groundbreaking title that will soon be setting trends.



89-80

A strong title that's hard to fault. Eminently playable and likely to remain on the hard drive for some time. But perhaps not the best in its field.

79-60

Competent and playable. A few gameplay flaws or unoriginality hold this game back from a higher rating. For fans of the genre.

59-40

Decidedly average. Probably either full of bugs or lacking some crucial features. But, most of all, probably boring.

39-0

A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid.

PC PowerPlay

All in-house previews, reviews & testing are done on Gateway computers

1800 500 742

www.au.gateway.com



SYDNEY 2000

All the fun of the Olympics - minus the corruption

DETAILS

Genre: Finger Fitness

Multiplayer: 1-8

Developer: Attention To Detail

Publisher: Eidos

Distributor: Ozisoft

Available: August

Rating: G

Need: PII-233, 64Mb RAM, 3D Videocard

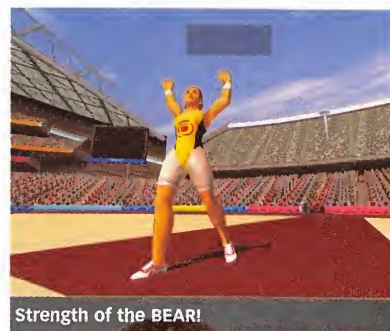
Want: PII-400, 128Mb RAM



The much-vaunted 'Coming Last' cam in action.



Tanya put paid to the inflatable roos.



Strength of the BEAR!

Prominently billed as the 'Official Videogame of the 2000 Olympics', the aptly-named Sydney 2000 is the first in what is destined to be a long line of IOC-sanctioned videogames based on the world's greatest sporting event. The very nature of games based on official licenses, and their inherently transient lifespans, make it an almost forgone conclusion that they will be lacking in depth and refinement.

Sadly, it seems that in the past most developers of these types of games were primarily motivated by the potential capital generated by their products, rather than the quality of the games themselves. But, in an encouraging and somewhat unexpected turn of events, Sydney 2000's development signifies a wholehearted abandonment of this once dubious means of revenue raising.

Though by no means a must-have purchase for hardcore gamers, Sydney 2000 represents a welcome revival of gameplay from a bygone era; one dominated by the likes of Commodore and Atari. Anyone old enough to remember those golden days of gaming will, in all likelihood, have fond memories of rainy primary school lunch hours whiled away playing 'button-bashers' like Track & Field, Summer Games and their ilk. Although they were rather simplistic, these games existed at



Nigel prayed for Gold.

the forefront of the action genre, thanks to their eminent playability and widespread appeal. It is these attributes which also see Sydney 2000 excel where others have failed dismally.

Comprehensive coverage

A total of twelve separate events constitute the extent of the game's Olympic coverage, and thirty-five different countries are represented. For the most part, the inclusion of these particular events is more than acceptable, though it's probable that more than a few gamers would eschew a rather lacklustre event like Sprint Cycling in favour of the infinitely more exciting Tae Kwon Do. At the same time, those same gamers should be thankful for the wisdom of the development team, who discounted the

ONLINE

www.eidos.com
The official site.

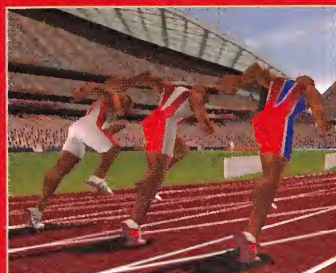


www.olympics.com
The latest news, plus the history of each event, its rules & when it will be held.



THE 12 TRIALS OF HERCULES

Of course, they couldn't cram all of the official Olympics events into one computer game, so they chose the best twelve. Without further ado...



100M SPRINT

The penultimate athletics-cum-computer game event. Maintaining a steady yet powerful rhythm on the keyboard within the ten second event remains a true sporting challenge.

110M HURDLES

Same as the 100M Sprint, but with bits to jump over. Frantic button-bashing tempered with precision jumping, this event isn't as easy as it looks.



JAVELIN

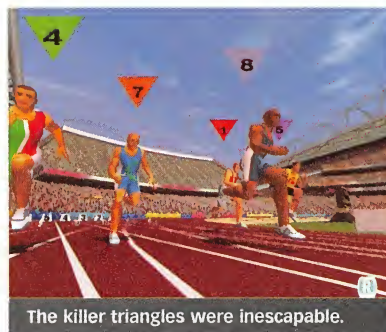
Hurl a long pole through the air, as far as you can. After the run-up action (for strength), players select a launch angle to maximise on throw distance.

HAMMER THROW

The ball and chain event. Players build up a steady rhythm in the spin, then must time the release for optimal distance.



Rupert may have come second, but at least he had shaved his legs for the photo finish.



something as simple as a **strategically timed dip** over the line can make all the difference

possibility of the inclusion of such riveting events as sporting's greatest oxymoron: the 50km Race Walk!

Arcade mode, an Instant Action style component, sees the player compete against seven CPU-controlled opponents for supremacy in each of the events. Points are awarded based on the player's performance in each event, with special bonuses granted for achieving standings in the top three. The overall goal of the Arcade Mode is to accumulate as many points as possible upon completion of the twelve events. These scores are then displayed on a High Score list at the conclusion of the competition.

In keeping with the ease of use required of games created for the mass market, Sydney 2000's controls are extremely simple. Many events require the use of as few as three buttons, and even the most complex use a maximum of six. Not that competing in these events is ridiculously easy. On the contrary, successful performance in any of the events requires excellent manual coordination and a well-developed sense of rhythm.

The fastest and the least complex event, the 100m Sprint, is relatively straightforward (no pun intended), but also requires some considerable skill

to succeed in. The two Power buttons must be tapped in increasingly rapid succession, and the player must maintain a constant rhythm for the duration of the sub-twelve-second race. Achieving a position of fifth place or sixth place is pretty easy, but finishing first, second or third place is far more difficult.

It is in this upper echelon of competitors that something as simple as a strategically timed dip over the line (using the Action button) can make all the difference between gaining a place on the podium and receiving a consolatory "better luck next Olympics" pat on the back.



TRIPLE JUMP

It's all about timing in the Triple J. PART ONE: steady run up. PART TWO: jump before foul line. Part three: the appropriate take-off angle. RESULT: world record!

HIGH JUMP

It's all in the approach. Maintaining a steady rhythm leading up to the jump ensures maximum height. Once airborne, a timely press of the action button sees athletes get their leg over.

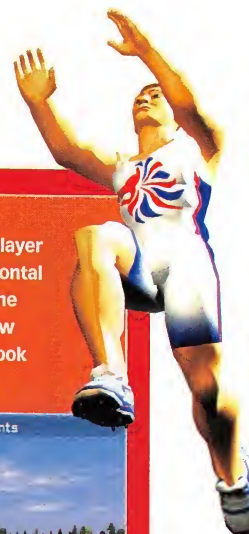


SPRINT CYCLING

An exciting event requiring that competitors maintain a steady and lighting quick rhythm action on the buttons. Lose the pace, and watch your dreams of gold disappear before your eyes.

SKEET SHOOTING

Skeet shooting asks player control both the horizontal and vertical pitch of the firearm using the arrow keys. Give us mouse look over this any day.



a true test of the player's reflexes and hence physically taxing

Virtual exertion

This is where the ancient axiom that practice makes perfect enters the picture. In addressing this matter, the Coaching section of the game helps a great deal. It details the specifics of the events and introduces the player to the intricacies of each. Through the use of a running commentary describing the onscreen demonstration, coupled with artfully executed freeze frames, the player is instructed in the ideal means by which to refine their technique. They are then given the opportunity to practice what they've learned without any of the stress that accompanies normal competition.

The final game mode is (surprise, surprise) Olympic, a single player campaign of sorts, and far more comprehensive than Arcade in every possible respect. The player selects a country to represent, and an event to compete in. They are then taken to a virtual gymnasium where various exercises relating to that event must be performed. For instance, the Skeet Shooting virtual gym features Recoil Control, Duck Shoot and Arc Interception exercises. These are skill-based subgames intended to exhaustively hone the player's skills through an aggressive and increasingly difficult regime that is a true test of the

player's reflexes, and hence physically taxing. Upon achieving certain prerequisite performance levels in each category, the player's skill levels in various areas such as Speed, Accuracy and Morale temporarily increase by a percentage based on that performance. Moving onward to an arena where the player then practices the sport itself, satisfactory performance will see the aforementioned skill level increases rendered permanent. The player must then compete against CPU players from the local area, and finish in the top three in order to move up the competition ladder. All these steps are repeated for the Regional and National levels of



KAYAKING

Fighting the downstream current, players must negotiate gates and other obstacles in a race to the finish line. Straightforward enough in theory - an absolute challenge in play.

WEIGHT LIFTING

A pure-button bashing event, broken up in various stages over the clean and jerk. The utmost in concentration is essential.



DIVING

Choose the type of dive, then match the right key press with the corresponding symbols during freefall. Perhaps the most gruelling event on the schedule, at least for those with poor timing.

100M FREESTYLE

The urge may be to bash the action keys to a bloody pulp, but no - a sterling race requires fluid and steady strokes throughout. First to the wall gets gold.



The proposed use of the kiddie pool for the Diving prompted calls for a change of venue.

competitors limbering up look frighteningly realistic



"Yes! All that training in Olympics 2000 paid off!"

competition, with performance requirements in both competition and training increased accordingly. By the time the player reaches the Olympic level of competition, they are left with a true sense of accomplishment, and an appreciation for the sacrifice and commitment involved in competing at an international level. In this regard, Sydney 2000 captures the essence of the Olympic spirit perfectly.

Limbering up

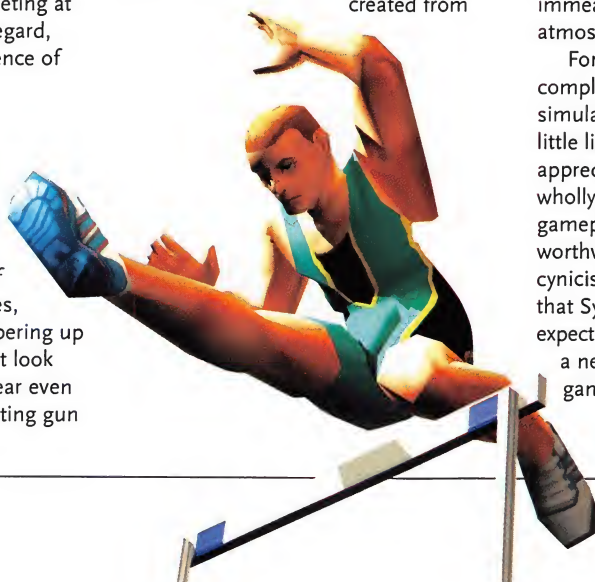
Visually and aurally, Sydney 2000 is practically without peer. The character animations were motion captured with the assistance of several current Olympic athletes, and it shows. Competitors limbering up and stretching prior to an event look frighteningly realistic, and appear even more impressive when the starting gun

fires. The uniforms of each country have been faithfully replicated, as have the general appearance, skin tone and build of athletes of various nationalities. The stadiums and arenas - including Stadium Australia in Homebush - within which the player competes have been created from

extensive photo profiles of the structures as well as blueprints provided by the architects. To round out the experience, competent commentary from Channel 7's Olympic coverage team - comprised of Tracey Holmes, Pat Welsh and Bruce McAvaney - adds immeasurably to the impressive atmosphere of realism.

For hardcore gamers who revel in the complexity of serious sporting simulations, Sydney 2000 may prove a little lightweight. But for those with an appreciation for uncomplicated, yet wholly enticing and downright enjoyable gameplay, Sydney 2000 is certainly a worthwhile investment. Put aside your cynicism toward SOCOG, and the fact that Sydney 2000 exceeds all expectations - and in doing so introduces a new generation to the classic gameplay of yore - is irrefutable.

Brett Robinson



PCPP

FOR:

- Incredible animations.
- Crisp graphics.
- Very addictive gameplay.
- Bruce in the commentary box.

AGAINST:

- Priceless earrings and ivy league college scholarships are not included - a definite drawback.

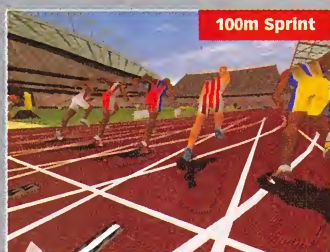
85

PCPP SYDNEY 2000 CHALLENGE



The proud staff of PowerPlay will never shirk a chance to play out national rivalries even if it's not in the grandstand of a major sporting event. The PCPP Olympics 2000 saw the coming together of four nations: David Wildgoose representing proud the Netherlands, March Stepnik representing brave Poland, Brett Robinson representing the hosts Australia and John Dewhurst representing noble South Africa.

Forget years of training, this encounter would only require deft timing and the most furious button mashing seen in years. The Olympic spirit lives on, as these fine athletes take every opportunity to deride, heckle and humiliate each other - in the name of international goodwill.



100m Sprint

100M SPRINT

The heats for the 100m are always tense, and the pressure showed in a number of false starts. Once the competitors were settled in we saw some powerful Olympic moments: Wildgoose ran bravely from a poor start for a well earned second; Robinson came in a lazy last and ran straight out of the stadium in shame.

RESULTS

Gold: Dewhurst (RSA)
Silver: Wildgoose (NED)
Lost their bottle in the heats:
 Dewhurst (RSA) & Stepnik (POL)



110m Hurdles

110M HURDLES

Certainly one of the more difficult events, the balance between maintaining speed and making it over the hurdles is an artform in itself, and something none of these athletes ever really negotiated with success. Dewhurst made all of the hurdles but came in with a particularly embarrassing time.

RESULTS

Gold: Stepnik (POL)
Silver: Wildgoose (NED)
Ran straight through all of the hurdles: Robinson (AUS) & Stepnik (POL)



Javelin

JAVELIN

Ugly scenes at the javelin when Robinson, unhappy with his performance thus far, took his frustration out on a lowly volunteer. Dewhurst recorded an impressive second throw; Wildgoose stepped up his efforts but was beaten by Stepnik for second place. Robinson was disqualified from PCPP Sydney 2000 and escorted out of the stadium.

RESULTS

Gold: Dewhurst (RSA)
Silver: Stepnik (POL)
Intentionally speared an official:
 Robinson (AUS)



Hammer Throw

HAMMER THROW

Tense competition turned to camaraderie as one and all tried desperately to get a throw - any throw - on to the field. This embarrassing chapter in Olympics history saw Wildgoose take the gold with the only legal throw in the competition.

RESULTS

Gold: Wildgoose (NED)
Wooden Spoon: Dewhurst (RSA) & Stepnik (POL)



Triple Jump

TRIPLE JUMP

The triple jump saw no world records broken but it was a tense competition. The slow pace of the event was disconcerting at first but Stepnik was soon blazing ahead with a number of fine jumps. Much punching of air was seen.

RESULTS

Gold: Stepnik (POL)
Silver: Wildgoose (NED)
Sand kicked in his face:
 Dewhurst (RSA)



High Jump

HIGH JUMP

The fiercest competition of the Olympics, the high jump turned into a two-way stand off. Stepnik took his time to warm to the event but as the pack thinned, these two went neck and neck raising the bar ever higher. The classy performance of Dewhurst was a tribute to his determination.

RESULTS

Gold: Dewhurst (RSA)
Silver: Stepnik (POL)
Frosby flop:
 Wildgoose (NED)



Sprint Cycling

SPRINT CYCLING

Certainly the oddest event we saw at PCPP Sydney 2000, the Dutch team furiously outclassed the field with an inspired ride that saw them lap their opponents! The South Africans ride with spirit and come in a respectable second for the silver.

RESULTS

Gold: Wildgoose (NED)
Silver: Dewhurst (RSA)
Laps another team:
 Wildgoose (NED)



Skeet Shooting

SKEET SHOOTING

All of that practise in the arcade and in FPS games counts for nothing in this event as the competitors struggle with the big weapons. Stepnik assumed the pigeons were real and turned on the judges. Dewhurst and Wildgoose managed to hit a target or two, with the Dutch coming up as victor.

RESULTS

Gold: Wildgoose (NED)
Silver: Dewhurst (RSA)
Tries to shoot judges: Stepnik (POL)

PCPP SYDNEY 2000 CHALLENGE



Kayaking

KAYAKING

With the water cold and the torrents high, the competitors battled with the challenging paddle. Stepnik showed finesse on the course successfully completing the first six gates before frustration set in and he raced it to the end. Dewhurst dominated, however, after Wildgoose refuses to compete.

RESULTS

Gold: Dewhurst (RSA)
Silver: Stepnik (POL)
Doesn't like to get his hair wet: Wildgoose (NED)



Weight Lifting

WEIGHT LIFTING

Tense stand-off in the weight lifting as confusion over the lights caused some lift failures. The big men never fail to impress however and we were given a tight contest from all. Wildgoose hadn't really eaten enough beef for the event. Dewhurst eventually prevailed with his intense concentration and personality on the platform.

RESULTS

Gold: Dewhurst (RSA)
Silver: Stepnik (POL)
Missed his steroid injection: Wildgoose (NED)



Diving

DIVING

Stepnik and Wildgoose looked shaky all night as their easier jumps failed and ran into neck injuries and belly-flops respectively. Dewhurst tried one of his harder dives to earn some pity from the judges. Although the competitors looked fantastic in their togs, it must be said that the standard of international diving is at an all time low.

RESULTS

Gold: Dewhurst (RSA)
Silver: Stepnik (POL)
Embarrassing Speedo wedgie: Wildgoose (NED)



100m Freestyle

100M FREESTYLE

It's a pity Robinson was disqualified as these other nations aren't known for their swimming. The swimming was furious and strong turns made Stepnik competitive. Some odd scenes were witnessed as Wildgoose attempted to use illegal flotation aids in his heat. Dewhurst showed a gutsy determination and took gold for his efforts.

RESULTS

Gold: Dewhurst (RSA)
Silver: Stepnik (POL)
Disqualified for floaty use: Wildgoose (NED)

THE CLOSING CEREMONY

OVERALL RAMBLINGS

GOLD

JOHN DEWHURST, REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

"My mighty nation will always be too strong for the rest of the world... at least when the Russians and West Germans aren't involved."

SILVER

MARCH STEPNIK, POLAND

"I'm very suspicious of the official rulings in PCPP 2000. I just wish I'd got a javelin into someone like Brett did..."

BRONZE

DAVID WILDGOOSE, THE NETHERLANDS

"The winner is the international sporting community - because it obviously wasn't me."

SHAME, SHAME, SHAME FOR:

BRETT ROBINSON, AUSTRALIA

"Tear it all down I say! The Olympics is too big, too powerful!... (continued wild ranting)"



Dewhurst clenches his fists in triumph.



GROUND CONTROL

Realtime Strategy comes of age

DETAILS

Genre: 3D Tactical RTS

Multiplayer: 1-8 via LAN or Modem (free WON.net account)

Developer: Massive Entertainment

Publisher: Sierra Studios

Distributor: Havas

Available: Now

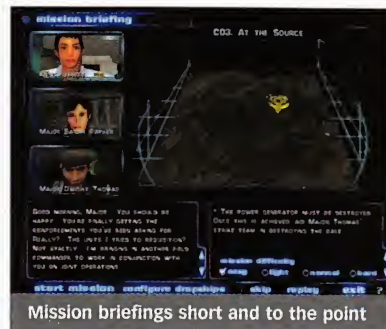
Rating: M

Need: P-200, 32Mb RAM, 306Mb HDD, 3D Videocard (D3D)

Want: PIII-450, 64Mb RAM, 500Mb HDD



Sarge, admit it - we're lost! Even when zoomed in, the map lets you know what's ahead.



Mission briefings short and to the point

BEHAVE YOURSELVES!

The Squad Behaviour Menu is a powerful tool that compliments the combined arms aspect of Ground Control. Recon squads can be directed to move cautiously and fire only if attacked; main combat elements can be tasked with holding ground at all costs; and reserves can be ordered to hold fire until sent into the fray.

ONLINE

www.massive.se
All of the information you could ever need is at Sierra's and Massive Entertainment's web sites - links, forums, hints and tips. Once you've mastered the single game, play free multiplayer at WON.net.



www.gccenter.com
Ground Control Center features a high traffic message board - perfect for hints and tips.



In their very first release, Sweden's Massive Entertainment has produced a tactical 3D RTS that lets you concentrate on commanding your troops instead of chopping down trees, harvesting fuel, or hunting deer!

By placing the emphasis on the sharp end, Ground Control avoids the repetition and ultimate boredom that plague many RTS titles, and gives you the chance to come up with something a little more original than building a hundred tanks and rushing the enemy.

Conglomerate evil

Ground Control initially places you in the role of Major Sarah Parker, a combat officer in the Crayven Security Forces, before letting you see things from the other side as Brother Jarred Stone of the Order of the New Dawn. The Crayven Corporation, with 900 million employees, is one of a number of mega-companies that pretty much run the show several hundred years into the future, following Earth's cataclysmic "16 Minute War." The "Dawnies," a religious group numbering some 700 million, also rose from the ashes to challenge rampant commercial expansion and spread the word. The plot seems fairly standard fare at first, but there are some surprising twists along the way.

Militarily wise, Crayven has the edge in resources and defensive equipment,

while the Order leads in high technology and the commitment of its troops. Although a treaty prevents fighting on Earth, the two sides slug it out over the colonisation and exploitation of planets throughout known space. The latest contested planet is Krig-7B, and it is there that you'll be given the chance to shine as a Field Commander. Massive's approach to game structure is quite innovative, as you must complete the 15 Crayven missions before trying your hand as a religious fanatic, and the story line continues throughout both campaigns. It all works pretty well, although some players may be disappointed that they can't choose sides in the single player game.

To the point

Ground Control is based around short tactical engagements with clearly defined objectives. As always, the trade off here is a mission based feel in the early stages rather than any real immersion in the wider campaign, although Massive has taken some steps to redress the balance. The briefings are comprehensive, mission preparation is straightforward, and every effort is made to get you inside the mind of your game character. After a set of verbal orders, supported by a standard 3D map, players can accept a default mission loadout or structure their own strike team.



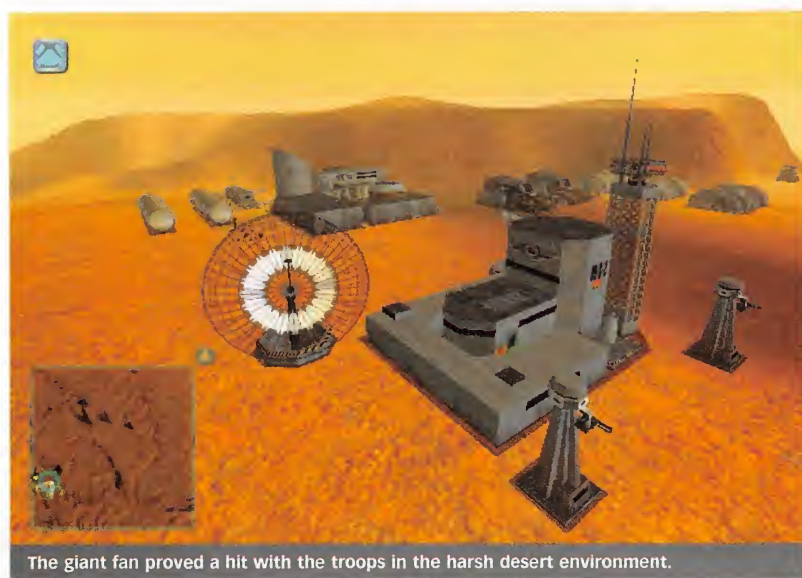
The whole configuration phase looks great on screen, and groupings are established using a simple click and drag process. Squads and equipment are selected, equipped, and assigned to dropships for transport to the planet's surface. Although the range of options is limited during the early missions, some interesting combinations are available as things progress, and players will find themselves making some tough decisions about what to take and who to leave behind. In a nice touch, all squads can be renamed, thereby giving you the chance to get your favourite AFL team into the action!



Do you think we should retreat?...



...No way, we'll be...



The giant fan proved a hit with the troops in the harsh desert environment.



ENEMY INFANTRY DESTROYED

...Fine!!

An ideal Ground Control strike team is a balanced force based around a number of squads. All strike teams include a Command APC (Armoured Personnel Carrier) - doubling as the force commander's control vehicle and mobile repair facility - accompanied by a mix of Infantry, Assault, Support and Aerodyne (airborne) squads. Each branch of the service has its own characteristics, and the key is to match the force mix to the mission objectives. Massive has opted to provide both sides with broadly similar capabilities, but the range of possible combinations ensures that players can tailor their forces to suit their preferred style - a feature that's particularly apparent during multiplayer.

players can tailor their forces to suit their preferred style

The bigger picture

Massive's emphasis on thinking tactical action rather than resource management or mass frontal assaults is evident as soon as you commence your first mission. For a start, players get the chance to check out the lay of the land by camera before calling the troops

A ROOM WITH A VIEW!

If you want to see just what 3D Real Time Strategies' should be all about, then order a squad to attack and then fall in behind the front rank! Ground Control brings out the cinematographer in us all.



down. This capability alone sets Ground Control apart from most RTS titles, in which you rarely get to make any choices up front. In most missions, you will at least have a little time to shake out your forces before the hordes arrive, thereby reducing the likelihood of an early unpleasant surprise. The only real disappointment here is the fact that the choice of drop zones is limited - a free hand in selecting the POE (Point of Entry) would add a whole new dimension to the game.

Having identified likely approaches and key terrain, force commanders can call drop-ships down as and when they choose (or leave some squads on hold as a reserve) and give the necessary

orders immediately. Support squads, for example, can be dispatched to high ground to take out power stations, command centres, or key weapons systems; assault vehicles can be moved to a concealed assembly area prior to launching the main attack; and infantry can be loaded into the Command APC for rapid transportation to a secondary objective. Squad-based movement will prove cumbersome for those used to controlling individual units, but it's a far more challenging (and realistic) system that places pressure on players to make decisions - you can't cover everything!

Whilst a number of RTS games go through the motions of combined arms tactics, this aspect of Ground Control is



Hula-hoops are essential army gear.

TOTAL CONTROL!

The interface is simple and if the detail gets all too much for you then you can switch it off.



absolutely superb. The pre-mission recon allows players to identify the best fighting positions for each unit type, so that they can be deployed to support each other. As you can't simply create new units at whim during a mission, correct tactical employment of the various troop types is essential. Most importantly, force preservation is encouraged by the fact that squads gain experience as they progress through missions, and they can also be upgraded or replaced as new options become available. Unfortunately, Massive goes too far by not including an in-game save feature. Given the duration and complexity of some missions, this omission will unnecessarily frustrate many players.

Situational awareness

Ground Control manages to combine a terrific degree of tactical depth with an intuitive interface. Squads can be selected with the mouse or by pre-set hot keys, and groupings are quickly established by dragging a box around the relevant units. Fire and move commands are also mouse based, and almost everything can be accessed through keystrokes. In a rare treat for RTS fans, squad facing can also be specified, and further flexibility is added through the use of an onscreen Squad Behaviour Menu. By pre-selecting the rules of engagement, type of movement, and default formation for each squad, the need to micromanage forces is



The hub of your universe. A CLSV-601 "Rhino" Command APC.

reduced and players can concentrate on the bigger tactical picture.

Situational awareness is the Achilles heel of traditional RTS games, with players expected to take personal charge of just about everything. The result is often a very reactive experience with no time to think. Ground Control addresses this problem through a combination of view options, quick selection icons, and a wealth of onscreen information. Whilst it seems cluttered at first, the interface provides enough information to let players concentrate on the big picture. The squad icons are particularly useful, allowing commanders to quickly assess force status and reducing the need to check out the situation in person. When necessary, double-clicking the relevant icon centres your view on the squad, or you can jump to the spot using the tactical map.

Alluring

Ground Control is a stunning game to look at, and the camera system shows it off to its full potential. Only those units or structures visible to your troops can be seen by the free-roaming camera, but all terrain features can be investigated. Mouse movement controls the camera, with the current facing shown on the tactical map. Altitude is adjusted via mouse wheel or keystroke, and the transition from overhead view to close zoom will take your breath away. The use of lighting and the close-up terrain modelling also

deserve a mention - this is simply the best looking RTS on the shelves.

Ground Control offers both standard (lobby) multiplayer games and the ability to 'drop in' on a game that's already underway. A host of options can be configured in either case, including maps, default squads, alliances, time and score limits, reinforcements and technology levels. The deathmatch drop-in game is a fantastic experience - no lobby or wasted chat. Just log on, choose your force, and head on down to the planet. Once landed, it's too late to change your cunning plan! The free WON.net account means that you can always find an opponent, and I've encountered no problems with the service.

Despite a few minor problems, Ground Control has set a new standard for 3D RTS. It's fast-paced, spectacular to watch, and it encourages innovative thought and calculated risk taking. Where other RTS titles up the tempo with endless resource management and reactive gameplay, Ground Control does it through a combination of mission planning and sheer tactical excitement. Massive Entertainment has hit the mark with its first shot. If you'd rather fight than farm, join the Crayven Corporation today!

Major Des McNicholas



PCPP

FOR:

- Innovative concept with no trees to chop down.
- A genuine opportunity to develop tactics and a terrific interface.
- Superb graphics.

AGAINST:

- No map markings during recon.
- No in-game save!!

90

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VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - REDEMPTION

If your life sucks, then seek some redemption in this blood-curdling RPG

DETAILS

Genre: RPG to Dismember

Multiplayer: 1-4

Developer:
Nihilistic Software

Publisher: Activision

Distributor: Activision

Available: Now

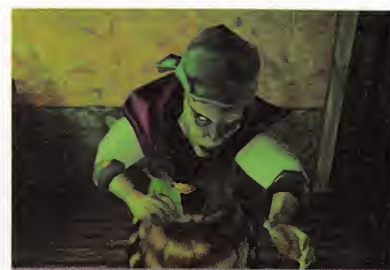
Rating: M15+

Need: PII-233, 32Mb
RAM

Want: PIII-450, 64Mb
RAM



"Hi, I'm Christof Romauld. You may remember me from other... What am I saying?"



The monster noises are really funny.



Their eyes met across the convent - love at first bite.

The vampire has always been the master of the horror genre. While on the outside these creatures are thought to be dignified, charming and romantic, they are at their centres base evil beings who thrive on the pain and suffering of the innocent.

In a sense, they represent Eve's apple - the promise of knowledge and power in return for very little else. Let's face it, immortality is worth the time and effort for a lifetime of heavy necking, isn't it?

Pen and pixels

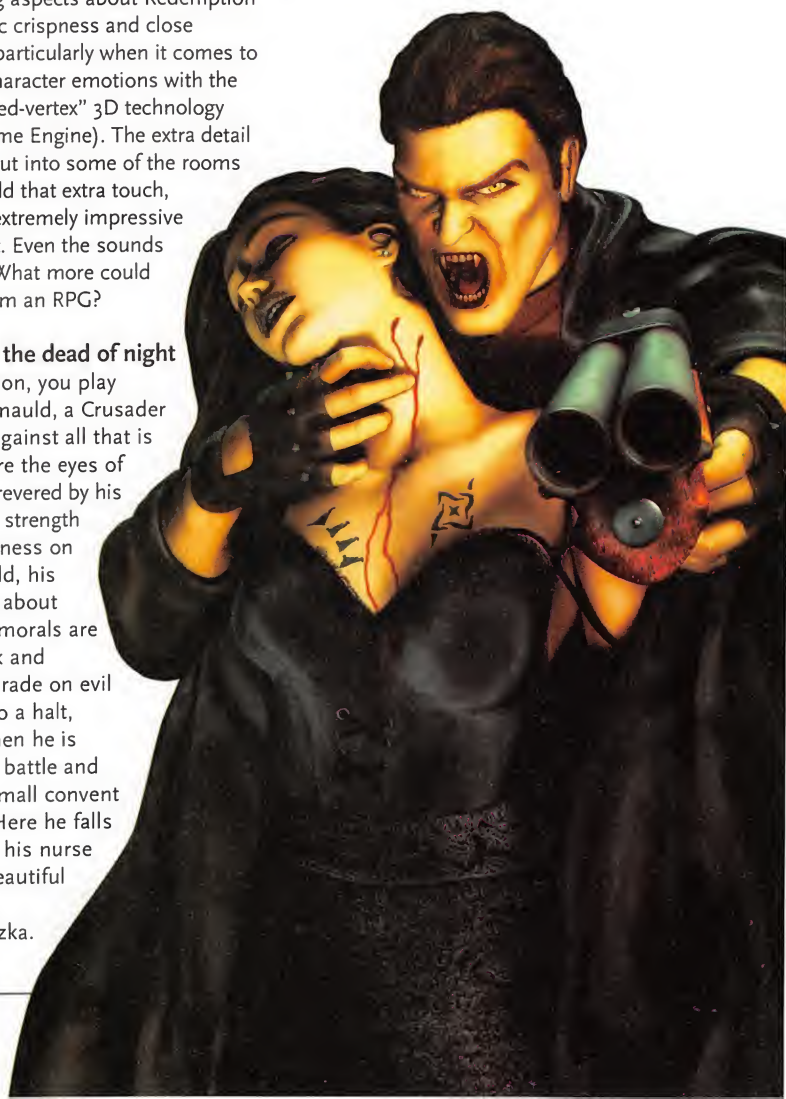
Given the recent rise in popularity of the occult, especially on mainstream television, it is not surprising that White Wolf Publishing commissioned Nihilistic Software to create a computer game based upon their pen-and-paper roleplaying game, Vampire: The Masquerade. As a consequence, the two companies have been working closely to ensure that Vampire: The Masquerade - Redemption remains true to its roleplaying fans and White Wolf's World of Darkness.

In this universe, thirteen Kindred, or vampire, clans fight for dominion. Only the Prince of the Kindred can give permission for his underlings to perform the Embrace, whereby a mortal is transformed into one of the living dead. His discretion is part of an effort to hide the existence of the Kindred from humankind - following a tradition known as The Masquerade. After all, the humans greatly outnumber their more nocturnal neighbours.

It is obvious that Nihilistic Software has gone to great lengths to provide a quality game to the public. One of the most striking aspects about Redemption is the graphic crispness and close cinematics, particularly when it comes to displaying character emotions with the new "weighted-vertex" 3D technology (see The Game Engine). The extra detail and decals put into some of the rooms and caves add that extra touch, creating an extremely impressive environment. Even the sounds are spooky. What more could you need from an RPG?

All alone in the dead of night

In Redemption, you play Christof Romauld, a Crusader who fights against all that is unholy before the eyes of God. While revered by his peers for his strength and fearlessness on the battlefield, his perceptions about the world's morals are strictly black and white. His tirade on evil is brought to a halt, however, when he is wounded in battle and taken to a small convent in Prague. Here he falls in love with his nurse - a young beautiful nun who is named Anezka.

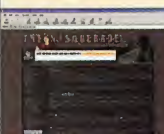


ONLINE

www.nihilistic.com
Nihilistic's home page.
Click Labor to read about Vampire.



themasquerade.org
A fan site, containing a walkthrough for the faint hearted.



Vampire.won.net
Site with access to the gaming channels and downloads, etc.

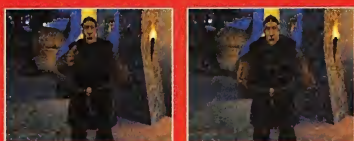




Don't you just hate it when all the tall people in the audience stand at the front.

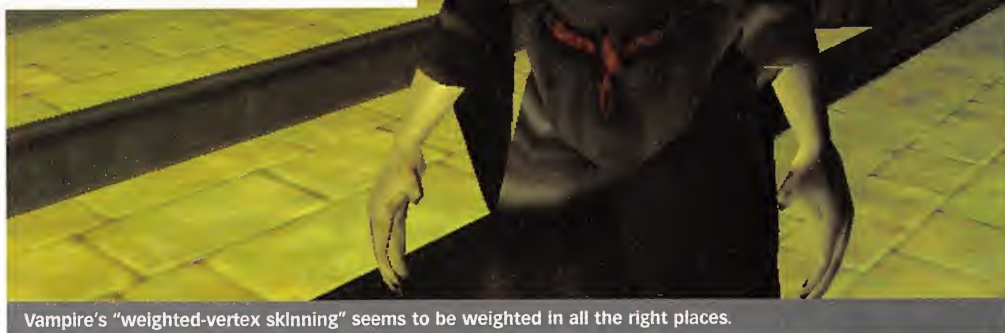
THE GAME ENGINE

Vampire uses a proprietary graphics engine designed by the Nihilistic Software. One of its special features is "weighted-vertex skinning". Here, the usual big heavy polygons seen in older games have been replaced by soft skins connecting individual 'nodes' and 'bones', much like a skeleton. By doing so, the skin's properties can be determined to see how it would react to external forces such as wind, gravity or movement. Its benefits are immediately obvious in the game, especially when it comes to near realistic facial expressions in cutscenes. Looking at these shots, you can see how the skin has stretched in response to the mouth movement while the creature is talking. Instead of the usual jumping vertical block. Eventually, this sort of technology can be used for simulating near-realistic wind movement on a cloak or curtain, for example.



Unfortunately, his yearning for a lady of the cloth and his increasing awareness of Prague's vampiric presence conflicts with his religious ideals and wavers his faith. At his moment of weakness, the leader of the Brujah clan chooses to embrace Christof and make him one of her own.

As one of the Brujah, Christof must further the political standing of his clan and prepare for the Jihad, the final unholy war about to envelop the Kindred. Of course, one of the greatest obstacles Christof has to face immediately is the change in his diet. Blood is an important



Vampire's "weighted-vertex skinning" seems to be weighted in all the right places.

resource in the game and is used to power all of the vampire's disciplines, including healing at will, inspiring awe, increasing combat abilities and growing claws.

Undead allies

As other Kindred clan members ally with the Brujah and join Christof's party (or coterie), other disciplines can be used such as melting into shadows, summoning animals and raining fire, to name a few. Each of these extra characters can be used in the same manner as Christof - those not under direct control will operate automatically and fight independently (when a certain bug hasn't prevented one of the characters from moving!)

One of the most interesting aspects about hand-to-hand melee are the damage types attributed to various weapons - an obvious by-product of the pen-and-paper game. Lethal damage, for example, is easily healed, but a critical hit may result in the instant beheading of the unfortunate foe. Aggravated damage, on the other hand, is more forgiving on the critical hit front, but it can take a lot of blood and time to repair. Of course, different armour styles and creature classes defend differently against each of these damage types. Interestingly, some weapons classes are more species specific. The Stake, for example, is generally a pathetic weapon

unless used against vampires. If a critical hit ensues, the vampire dies almost instantly!

Although slaying undead foes should give him some kudos with his Lord, Christof must also wrestle 'the beast within' to retain his humanity so he can finally face his beloved Anezka once again. Maintaining Christof's humanity is by no means an easy task - every dialogue option has the potential to increase or decrease Christof's Humanity levels. Slaying innocent bystanders also has a detrimental effect to his scores.

his yearning for a lady of the cloth conflicts with his religious ideals

Oh the humanity

While Redemption bears all the traditional RPG hallmarks - character statistics, experience and skill levels - it is Christof's fight for his mortal soul that provides the true roleplaying element of the game. This internal struggle does not just happen overnight though. The game takes place between Dark Age Prague and Vienna into modern day London and New York. A variety of environments set the scene for Christof's adventures,

THE CLANS

The Kindred clans can be traced directly to Cain, the slayer of his brother Abel. After being cursed by the Lord, Cain spawned a brood of vampires who in turn Embraced thirteen more. These thirteen each founded a distinct clan of Kindred with different personalities and abilities to succeed them.

The Brujah, for example, are the rebellious rabble of the vampiric underworld. Although they are generally thugs, they pride themselves on their free-thinking attitudes. The Nosferatu are by far the ugliest of the Kindred. Being truly repulsive, they have learnt to hide away from vampire and human alike in favour of the dark catacombs and crypts.

Although there's a lot of infighting between clans, they all fear the day their original creators awaken. Legend suggests that each elder will

seek out his progeny and consume them to replace their depleted blood supplies. Needless to say, each clan is doing their best to ensure their clan remains safe from harm when the time comes.



including forests, graveyards, catacombs, towers, dungeons, slums and shops.

With its environmental diversity, character control technique and paper-doll inventory system, Redemption is somewhat akin to Baldur's Gate and Diablo. Like these titles, Redemption is very action-oriented and involves slaying copious quantities of creatures to complete the quests. Unlike BG, for instance, it has a very linear story structure - even the dialogue boxes don't seem to make much of a difference (except to your Humanity levels). While this type of play does reinforce the tight and enthralling storyline, it can be disappointing as the graphics engine supports an environment that simply encourages you to wander!

I did on one occasion complete part of the game out of order: I ran around a huge golem intent on painting the courtyard with my blood, and disappeared into a graveyard, only to be congratulated by a ghoulish figure on my successful fight. Elated, I ran back hoping the golem had been slain by the biggest demon in the universe - Sir PC Bug. Unfortunately, I had to reload the game.



Chiropractic treatment was obviously prohibitively expensive in the village.

To keep the game challenging, let alone frustrating game reviewers on deadlines, you can only save the game in select areas of the world. Thankfully, there is a savegame point in your Haven, where you can rest during daylight hours and use your experience to enhance your chosen disciplines and skills. It also autosaves whenever you change to a different area of the map and this can sometimes be used to advantage - especially when fighting next to the level entrances!

When being alone gets too scary...

Redemption is not limited to single player games. Nihilistic has chosen to incorporate the World of Darkness in a WON server in a manner not unlike Blizzard's Battle-net. Here, gamers can chat in channels and join games with pre-created online characters. Gamers can choose to create ghouls, humans or any of the available vampire types from either the Dark Ages or the Modern Era and play in any of the standard or custom campaign settings.

One of the best features about the multiplayer component of Redemption is that it is possible to involve a Storyteller (ST) in the game, who hosts the campaigns and guides other players through the use of dialogue options, character editing or direct intervention. Nihilistic has also recently released a game editor which uses Java script to develop whole campaigns and completely edit the gameworld. In this way, it is possible for players to explore an almost infinite universe.

Unfortunately, the roleplaying element is not particularly strong online at the moment, with characters adopting a slay-all or player-killer attitude. On the bright side, however, it is possible for an ST to boot characters out of the game if

necessary. Given time, proper roleplaying games can be found and these are highly rewarding - some games are reported to last up to three hours!

Unfortunately, multiplayer Redemption is currently prone to crashing, which is quite remarkable given that it is stable during single-player games. The one drawback with a predominantly USA online game on WON is that Australian lag rates can be pretty high. I must admit, however, that my 33.6kbs modem is probably not the best standard to go on, although some lag periods were up to three minutes in length.

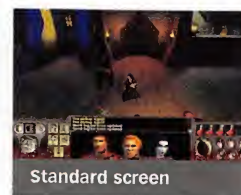
Christof must wrestle the beast within to retain his humanity

Spectral musings

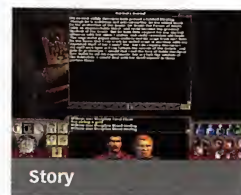
Vampire: The Masquerade - Redemption is a great roleplaying game built on a solid, stable game engine and mixed with a healthy storyline. Like many current RPGs, there is a great deal of action-based combat. The storyline is strengthened by its linearity, although I think that the other areas of the map could have been made a little more accessible for the simple sake of exploration. Integral parts of the story are well supported by movies clips and audio speech.

One of the most promising aspects of Redemption is its potential for truly amazing online play - once the game crash issues and lag problems are sorted. One of the biggest pluses is that when online games finally support custom skins, I can create a gorgeous human female character that goes by the name of Buffy. Vampires beware!

Ryan Hovingh



Standard screen



Story



Multiplay

PCPP

FOR:

- Complex storyline.
- Quality cutscenes and speech.
- Fantastic online potential.
- Stable game during single-play.

AGAINST:

- Linear gameplay.
- Occasional hiccups with non-moving characters.
- Buggy online games.

82

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ICEWIND DALE

Interplay's hack'n'slash RPG emerges just moments before Diablo II

DETAILS

Genre: Gigantic
Immersive dungeon crawl

Multiplayer: Yes (1-6)

Developer: Black Isle

Publisher: Interplay

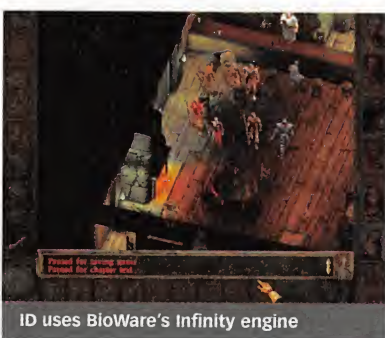
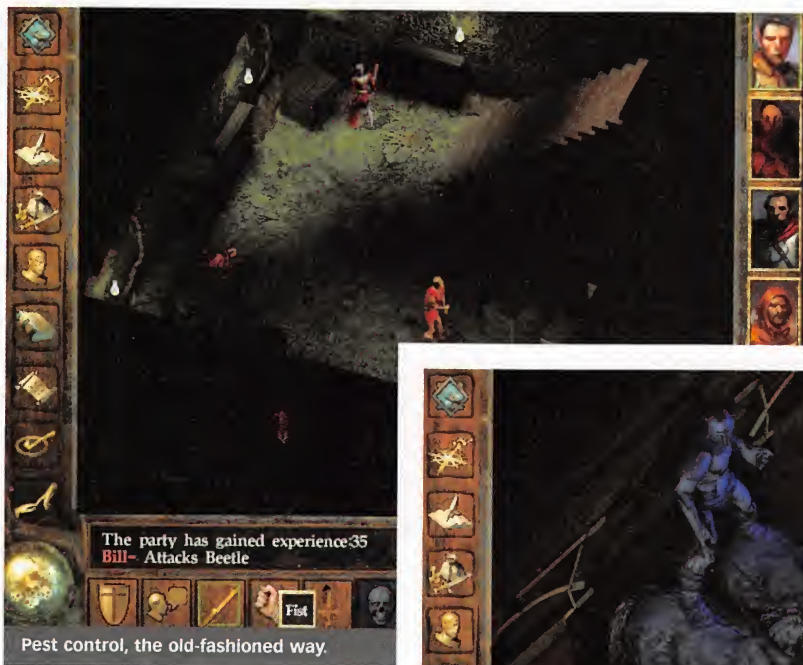
Distributor: Interplay

Available: Now

Rating: M

Need: P-200, 32Mb RAM

Want: PII-300, 64Mb RAM



ONLINE

Official Website
www.interplay.com/icewind

Baldur's Gate Chronicles
<http://www.BGChronicles.com/>

Ice Winds of Dale
<http://icewind.dbtavern.com/>

I should probably admit that I'm biased. Planescape: Torment is easily my favourite RPG of all time, if not my favourite game of all time. When I head that Black Isle, the team behind both Torment and Baldur's Gate was set to loose another creation on the world I fairly swooned. Icewind Dale is, unfortunately, not at the pinnacle of excellence Torment was, but it's still pretty damn cool.

A bollocking

Classic D&D is where this particular product is at. It's hack and slash time, children, and it's all old school. Assemble your party just like in the olden days, by rolling stats, assigning alignment, hit points, deciding character classes and races and all the rest of it. Then give them stupid names and let them loose on the world like any good RPG. But pay attention. Unlike BG,

weapon proficiencies have become a lot more important to the overall combat levels of your PCs. It's single weapons that require proficiency now, not groups of weapons. Pick carefully.

The game then basically turns into a gigantic fight. You get your first

game. It's linear, it's totally combat based and while stating that it's dull would certainly be pushing the limits, I should say that unless you are a frothing combat monkey, you may not get as much out of it as you did with Torment or even Baldur's Gate.

the real **beauty** of the game is without doubt the monsters... these **buggers** are **big**

mission, which is to travel to the south of the Dale to find some answers to why beasts are bothering your town and that is pretty much the last conversation that you will have of substance. This is not a talking type game, you understand. It never pretends to be. And, getting straight into it, this is the big fault with the

Delightful spells

But, supposing you love combat, then you are going to have mucho blood letting fun. The game uses an isometric top-down viewpoint (and interface), and combat all takes place in realtime. It's fast, it requires concentration and - keeping up with the high standards previous games have set - it looks, feels

COME BACK & FIGHT!

Combat in the Dale is a tricky thing and one that requires tactical planning. There are a few solid methods you can use. The first is to send in a quick character, usually a thief to lure foes into an ambush. Then pepper the enemy with missile weapons and the spells. Once that is done, jump in and focus attacks on one target. Keep your mages out of physical contact if you can. Position them where they can provide supporting fire and enhancement spells.



The snow was so heavy, it took days for our adventurers to leave this stretch of road.



Prumpette's ravishing charm...



...repelled the hordes of evil spawn.



It's lucky all the doors are facing south.

and sounds great. Spells look as good as ever and the animations are smooth. Expect a variety of new spells from the pen and paper that have not made it to PC yet. Sunray, Conjure Fire Elementals, Heal and Fire Storm, Chain Lightning, Death Fog, Prismatic Spray and Shades - what a delight!

The attention to detail that makes Black Isle one of the great teams is present. The sound of weapons chopping into meat is particularly satisfying, as are the screams of the dying. But the real beauty of the game is without a doubt the monsters. These buggers are scary and big. The Tundra Yeti, the frost giants, the Cyclops and the Umber Hulks are all here, are all big and all move beautifully.

Going through the worlds is a pleasure all in itself. The different locales are spectacular, moving from open snowfields through to abandoned,

ancient Dwarven cities. Then there are the geothermal caverns, the volcanoes, the black caves and the bone-strewn lairs. The atmosphere, lighting, the detail, the strange and wonderful architecture - all of it combined highlights pure Black Isle style and pure quality. Very simply, no one has an eye for beauty like these guys. No one else puts as much care and love into the total visual appearance of a game.

Rampant destruction

Improvements in the Bioware Infinity engine are hard to make. It's so smooth, but the big wart on the nose is the character tracking. Remember the Fortress of Regrets in Torment? You had to spend so much time getting to the final battle it was barely worth it. Well, that's exaggerating, but just take my word for it. Dale's engine has improved on both this and on

character "bumping". They'll not stop moving if they hit each other now. Resting is a bit easier as well, with the command on the playing screen. Walking speed is 40% faster as well which is almost as much a relief.

As mentioned before, the whole point of Icewind Dale is to pretty much destroy every living creature you encounter, so if you are still high on things like System Shock 2 then this won't really be of much interest to you. But as far as dungeon crawls go, I'd have to recommend this one pretty highly. With the improvements made, the Bioware Infinity engine makes the transformation from interaction to combat model smoothly. It's like Diablo meets Starcraft and gives the player much leeway and strategic gameplay. Clever, beautiful and with a superb engine, you really can't get much better.

Christian Read

PCPP

FOR:

- Great level design
- An excellent engine
- Fantastic monster animation

AGAINST:

- Hack 'n' slash...
- ...and repeat

80

DAIKATANA

It's the game **everyone** has an opinion about. So what's ours?

DETAILS

Genre: Firstperson Shooter

Multiplayer: Yes (1-16 via Internet, LAN)

Developer: Ion Storm

Publisher: Eidos

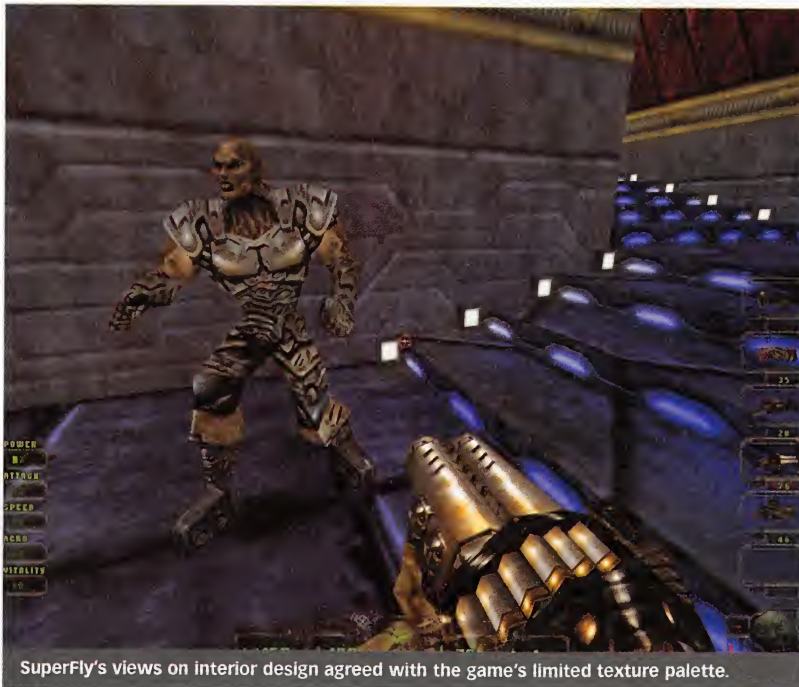
Distributor: Ozisoft

Available: Now

Rating: M

Need: P-233, 32Mb RAM, 3D Videocard (D3D, OpenGL)

Want: PIII-500, 64Mb RAM



SuperFly's views on interior design agreed with the game's limited texture palette.



Clever puns are the game's strong point.



One of Daikatana's many corridors.

Long ago, when movies about dinosaurs ruled the Earth and the Backstreet Boys were still just an itch in some record producer's trouser area, John Romero decided to make a break from the successful Doom and Quake teams and try his luck developing a title all his own. Three and a bit years later - after some scandal and intrigue - the task is finally complete.

Romero probably saw himself as an independent lone warrior, a John Wayne archetype engaged in the fight to create original PC titles. However, after an extremely lengthy development process and massive budget blowouts, the industry is more likely seeing him as its very own Kevin Costner, with his very own Waterworld. For Daikatana to make a profit now it will have to become the biggest selling PC game of all time. Can it live up to the task?

Cheesy gods

First impressions of Daikatana will probably remind you of Epic's Unreal; it might even make you think that you're back in Na Pali as its heavily modified Quake II engine and the design of the early levels make the games look almost identical. Daikatana even has its own performance enhancing fruits growing on little trees, just like Unreal.

Beyond this Daikatana shows some originality by dividing itself into four

SQUAD SQUABBLES

If you have a squadmate with you and it looks like the only way forward is through a duct or vent, tell your squadie to wait as there will usually be another, more direct, way around for them when you can find it. Otherwise you may get them stuck somewhere, making it impossible to finish the level.



your mighty Daikatana gains in length whenever a maiden comes into view

unique zones - Japan, Ancient Greece, Medieval Norway and a future San Francisco - with each one having a unique set of six weapons. Because of this, and the fact that your enemies are specialised and confined to each specific area, the separate zones each provide a different challenge. Japan, for example, is swarming with robots, built by Nintendo when their console business went bust. Make sure you duck when they start hurling bananas.

The Greeks, on the other hand, will throw their ancient Gods, mythical beasts and their women with moustaches at you. The Norwegians have developed some rather nasty smelling cheeses as well as a few twists on the knights and monsters of the

Middle Ages. While the San Franciscans of the future have forgotten all about peace, love and the stockmarket.

A mighty sword

There are a few more innovative features that have survived the long development time. At the beginning of a game you're given the choice of three characters, each of whom has different abilities in terms of speed, strength and agility. Your character and the weapons you use in the game can also become more effective as you gain experience, particularly your mighty Daikatana which gains in length and stature whenever a comely wench or temple maiden comes into view.

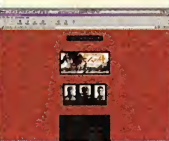
If you're used to taking on the 'bots' in Unreal Tournament or Quake III

ONLINE

www.daikatana.com
The official site.



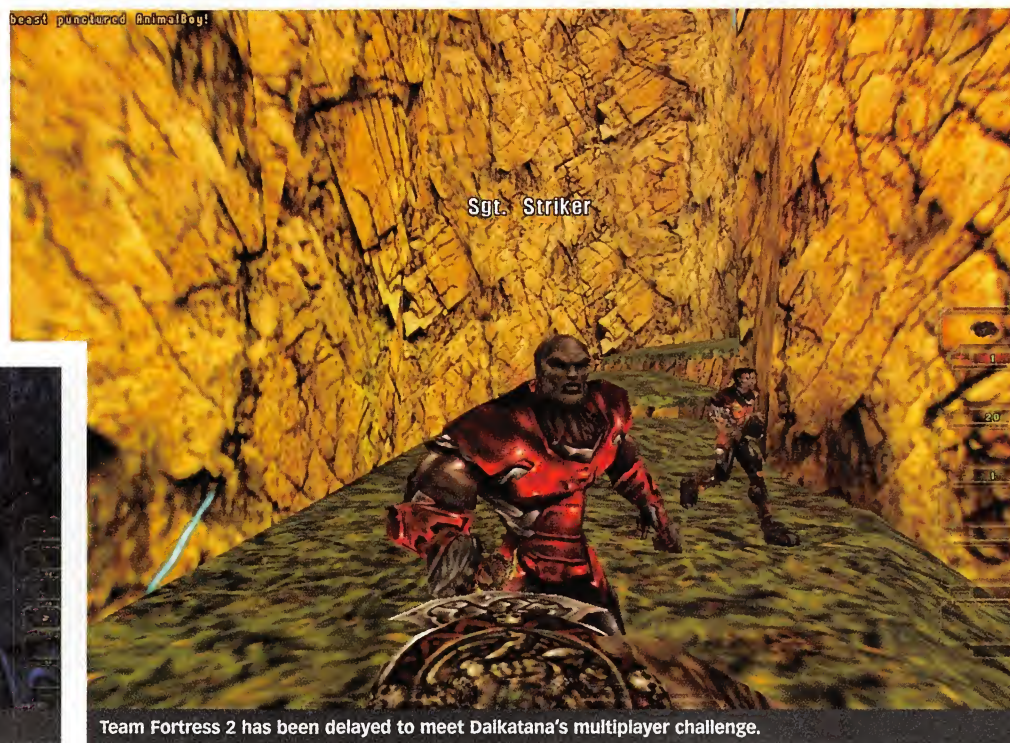
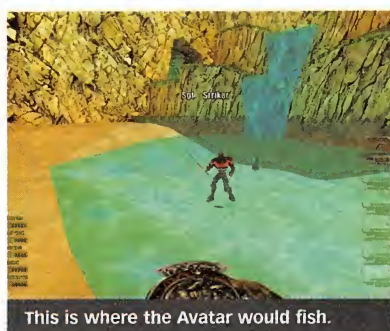
www.klwi-us.com/~watabe/samurai.html
Kurasawas film the 'Seven Samurai' should get you in the mood...





WE'LL MISS YOU, QUAKE 2

Daikatana will probably be the last game released using the venerable Quake 2 engine. This incarnation's been modified to allow it to support more effects, architectural complexity and environmental audio. Ion Storm claims this to be the most advanced version of the Q2 engine to date, so don't expect it to run as fast or as smoothly as the original. In fact, Daikatana runs quite a bit slower. For example, my system runs Soldier of Fortune at 1280X960X32 very smoothly. To get the same speed out of Daikatana I need to run it at 1024X768X32, two levels of resolution lower.



Daikatana you might ask yourself why Ion Storm didn't include such things in Daikatana. Sure you pick up some squad mates in the single player game but they get lost easily, especially in crawl spaces, and just get in the way. Where you really need them, in the multiplayer section, they aren't implemented.

Another possibly controversial feature is the game's use of save gems like some sort of console RPG. Perhaps Eidos wanted to exploit the PS2 and Dreamcast markets as quickly as possible to try and make some of their money back, or maybe they just wanted to make the single player game more difficult.

Dated but tough

After more than three years in construction, and with Romero's track

record, it would be fair to expect Daikatana to have some excellent maps and a well-developed single player storyline to make full use of its large gameworld. However, neither is really true. Both Kingpin and Soldier of Fortune have much more involving single player games, while Quake III and Unreal Tournament offer better maps from a multiplayer perspective, leaving Daikatana to feel a bit dated.

The only thing that really gives Daikatana good value is its extreme difficulty. Even on the easy settings experienced gamers will face a challenge, while the not so experienced will be heading for the 'net to grab whatever cheats they can find. But, then, it's only good value if you don't give up in sheer frustration first.

Of course, one can't review a game like this without going into its multiplayer aspects. Here, even though at the time of writing local Daikatana servers were as hard to find as straight men in Molly Meldrum's sauna, players in the US and UK didn't have any complaints about the game's technical abilities. The only complaint was the lack of variety in Daikatana's online repertoire compared to Unreal Tournament.

So Kevin Romero rides off into the sunset to think about his next big project, something to do with a post-holocaust courier service. Daikatana isn't a bad game, however its late release has made things difficult. Its innovative edge has been lost in the mists of time, though there is still fun to be had.

George Soropos

PCPP

FOR:

- A real challenge for the solo player.

AGAINST:

- Uninspired level design.
- Clichéd plot.
- Gets frustrating.

64

MDK 2

And we're still not entirely sure we know what it stands for...



DETAILS

Genre: Action

Multiplayer: No

Developer: BioWare

Publisher: Interplay

Distributor: Interplay

Available: Now

Rating: TBA

Need: PII-233, 24Mb RAM, 500Mb HDD, 3D Videocard

Want: PII-300, 32Mb RAM



Mack Daddies' Krib?



Multiple Deranged Killers?



Melodramatic Danish Kettles?

The following are excerpts of conversations I had with a bud the day my copy of MDK2 arrived:

Bud (in derisive tone): "MDK2? Isn't that... y'know... a platformer?"

Me: "Well... sort of. It's kind of a..."

Bud: "So it sucks, then."

Me: "No, actually, it..."

Bud: "Platformers suck on PC. You should've asked to review Daikatana."

Me: "Shut up." (One hour passes)

Me: "Look, man, I need to get working, so..."

Bud (making explosion noises with his mouth): "Hang on! I just have to kill this guy so I can... (starts laughing like a maniac as big thing explodes) Hah! Did you see that?!"

Me (looking at watch and tapping foot): "(sigh)"

Mixed Bag

The aforementioned bud is an absolute anti-platform gamer. He simply refuses to play them. Yet he wouldn't budge from playing MDK 2 for a good two hours. The original game was often maligned and avoided by the PC gaming public in a lot of cases because of anti-platformer sentiment, but both it and its sequel are more like a few different gaming styles thrown into a bag and shaken around a bit. The end result is a game that will make you want to keep playing to see what little quirk or gameplay style it'll throw at you next.



Melodramatic Danish Kettles?

While the original MDK was developed by Shiny, the sequel was passed to one of their Interplay stablemates, BioWare, who created Baldur's Gate. And MDK 2 is a title that certainly proves they're not only good for churning out RPGs. They have done an excellent job of retaining much of the appeal of the original game, while upgrading and tweaking it in almost every way possible... and then some! The sense of humour behind much of the original game is still here in spades (and, dare I say, maybe even a little better), while all the features that worked well have been retained.

Character to Spare

After a brief Kirby-esque comic book cutscene, the game takes off mere moments from where the last game left off. Dr Hawkins (token mad scientist), Max (token 6-limbed cybernetic dog)

and Kurt (token janitor and superhero) are enjoying a celebratory drink when it becomes apparent that all is still not well on Earth. Aliens are still ploughing its resources and population up using gigantic vehicles called minecrawlers, and it's up to Kurt to stop them once again.

Fans of the original game will know what to expect from the first level. Kurt is equipped with a special "coil suit" with a rapid-firing machine gun on one arm, a special parachute, and a sniper's helmet (basically a gun and a helmet in one). Utilising his skills, you'll need to make your way through the level to confront the pilot of the minecrawler, and put a stop to his minecrawling ways. Generally, the game as Kurt plays like a frantic (and somewhat mindless - but in a good way) shooter with bouts of platform and sniping influence.

Don't let the word "platform" put you off, though, because from there

ONLINE

www.interplay.com/mdk2/
Official home site of MDK2.



www.mdk2.com/
MDK2 fan site featuring news, interviews, a designer diary, and more.



www.mdk2.com/game/designer1.shtml
This designer diary makes for interesting reading, and gives you a bit of an insight into what was going through developer's minds in the process of making the game.





things take a novel twist. While they made cameo appearances in MDK, Dr Hawkins and Max are actually playable characters in certain levels of MDK 2, and both have unique skills. Dr Hawkins has the ability to turn common items into various contraptions to help him on his way (tabasco sauce and a dishcloth into a molotov cocktail, anyone?), while Max's four arms allow him to hold up to four weapons at once! Playing as Kurt makes you think nothing could top his arm-cannon... until you leap into a room as Max armed with quad uzis. Cap that off with various smaller sub-games - such as a level where you control a fish that needs to make its way to an underwater button - and you have several gameplay styles that aren't likely to make you bored in a hurry.



What's more, the game constantly puts in nice touches that make you want to push on and see more. One point early on sees Max jumping from platform to platform, observed by several couch-potato robots watching him through a hologram. As Max takes his jump the robots collectively gasp, launching into hoots when he lands successfully. Little things like that actually prove to be great incentive to try and push on further simply because of their entertainment value.

you'll absolutely blitz through the game in short order. Also, while playing as Kurt and Max can be lots of mindless blasting fun, Dr Hawkins' segments seem to consist of sporadic bouts of clever combined with annoyingly tricky jumping puzzles. They're matter-of-time things, but they can certainly be unforgiving at times.

Finally, the game's diversity cuts both ways. Some of the sub-games, while novel, seem to have had very little thought put into them. The variety of styles of play are certainly welcome, but they certainly verge on hair-pulling frustration from time to time simply because you're not quite sure just what you're capable of, much less supposed to be doing!

Despite its flaws, though, MDK 2 simply seems to sneak up on them, distract them with an inflatable monkey decoy and fill them full of holes from four weapons at once. For its few moments of variety or platform-fuelled frustration there are far too many "wow, that's cool" moments to not recommend it as a game worth trying out, even if the word "platformer" makes you want to give the soles of your boots a merciless beating with Mario's face. If you're after something not too taxing on the ol' grey matter, good for a chuckle, and that'll make you want to play it through to the end, MDK2 is definitely worth a look.

Murray Philbrick

the sense of humour behind the original game is still here in spades

Environmentally Conscious

The environments in MDK 2 are nothing short of spectacular, expanding the often small levels of the original and exploiting modern hardware power to make broad and surreal alien structures. Most of the levels consist of an open area followed by an area of narrow hallways in rinse and repeat fashion, which can get a tad repetitive and linear. Still, as you emerge from a hallway into a mist-set, glass-domed area you're likely to forgive such things. In this case, the constantly smooth-as-butter framerate combined with the amazing landscapes seem to make the linearity worthwhile.

All this is added to by the sheer style of virtually every part of the game, from the running comic book theme, the great thumping soundtrack, or the thinly-veiled movie rip-offs from time to time (Max's first cutscene is reminiscent of the Matrix, music and all). Combined with the environments, all this adds up to a laundry list of good points that grab you and make you want to keep playing.

All good things...

Of course, with all this variety there were bound to be problems that slipped through. For starters, the overall game length seems a bit on the short side. On anything but the hardest two settings,

PCPP

FOR:

- Smooth graphics.
- Great environs.
- Gameplay variety.

AGAINST:

- Frustrating jumping segments.
- Subgames are rather inconsistent.

84

ALIEN NATIONS

Cute and cheeky realtime strategy

DETAILS

Genre: Strategy

Multiplayer: Yes (1-4)

Developer: Neo

Publisher: JoWood

Distributor: Ozisoft

Available: Now

Rating: G

PCPP
75

Three alien races lost on a distant world and brought together by a common bond of understanding decide to stand side by side and tackle their problems as one. An example of brotherhood and understanding that may become the model of a peaceful universe. NOT! How about three belligerent space blobs who hate each other at first sight and decide to make throw rugs out of each other as quickly and efficiently as they possibly can? Now that's more like it.

The gameplay in Alien Nations sits somewhere between The Settlers and the more traditional realtime strategy of Command & Conquer, combining both the detailed resource and city management of a God game with the combat ethic of a straight RTS title.

Resource management is much more involved than a typical RTS title in that goods not only require harvesting/mining, they can also be processed and refined into other goods

which are even more useful to your little community.

Bright side

The three races, the Pimmons, the Amazons and the Sajikis, share over 75 building and unit types, but have enough significant differences to make then each a unique challenge. Unfortunately this also means that multiplayer action is confined to only three players, but on the bright side that keeps things moving quickly, even with a slow net connection.

Alien Nations has obviously been designed to charm the player with its cute graphics and sly attempts at humour, and it succeeds in ways that The Settlers did not. Alien Nations isn't groundbreaking, but it also doesn't throw any annoying gameplay foibles at the player. If you liked The Settlers you will more than likely also enjoy this.

George Soropos



The alien world looks eerily similar to ours.



This caption refuses to settle here.

KING OF DRAGON PASS

Drab, tedious and incredibly dated

DETAILS

Genre: Read 'n Click RPG

Multiplayer: No

Developer: A Sharp

Publisher: A Sharp

Distributor: TBA

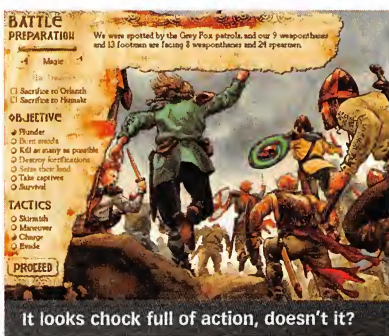
Available: Now

Rating: TBA

PCPP
31



Note to self- Don't open alliance



it looks chock full of action, doesn't it?

Adventure and Heroism on a Magical Frontier" is the marketing slogan perdomantly emblazoned on the cover of "King Of Dragon Pass" (KoDP), a hitherto unheard of game from a hitherto unheard of software developer.

After playing the game, I decided to send off a suggestion to the publisher for a new, more appropriate slogan to be placed on the packaging: "Box of un-fun. Danger. Do Not Open".

I expect the new, amended, and more truthful box to be on the shelf anytime now.

Biblical

Being a predominantly text-based affair randomly pockmarked with 'action' frames that look like they were lifted straight out of an illustrated Bible, KoDP would have been a noteworthy game if not for one major oversight by the programmers - the 1980's ended, like 10 years ago. Back then, this game would

have been state-of-the-art stuff with its bland audio/visual presentation and tedious click-n-read gameplay. Now, however, these are just faults - and big ones. Big faults which could quite possibly have been overlooked if KoDP had an interesting, intense story.

KoDP does not have an interesting, intense story. Instead, it has a series of completely unconnected, tedious events which seemingly have no end purpose to them other than more of the same. This really takes away any incentive to play the game at all, leaving it seeming rather pointless and, most of all, mundane.

Although it could appeal to fans of this niche of a genre - it is, admittedly, incredibly detailed - KoDP really has nothing to make it at all appealing to the typical gamer. If you're looking for a bit of sword and sorcery fun, play Age Of Empires instead - it has actual 'moving' pictures.

Daniel Staines

MAXIMUM FLIGHT

If anyone can fly **four craft at once**, it's Major Des

DETAILS

Genre: Historical and Modern Flight Sim Set

Multiplayer: Yes (varies)

Developer: various

Publisher: Empire Interactive

Distributor: QV Software

Available: Now

Rating: G8

PCPP
78

Hmm... let's see: too early for the Christmas releases, but we could milk a few more bucks out of some old titles - must be compilation time! Empire Interactive's Maximum Flight is the usual big box with nothing inside, but at least a couple of the games are first class, and the price is definitely right.

Flying Corps Gold (PCPP#20, 74%) added multiplayer support and a Mission Editor to the original title, and it still holds up remarkably well for those who like sitting at 5000 feet in a canvas box held together with glue and rubber bands. Stunning aircraft models are let down by the terrain detail, but the realistic flight model still poses a major challenge if you like doing things the hard way.

I rate Mig Alley (PCPP#42, 92%) as the best flight sim release of 1999, and it still looks great almost 12 months later. No HUDs, MFDs or FCRs to do the job for you - just strap yourself onto a great big engine, grab your joystick



The yellow stripes are a nice touch.

and let rip! As well as seat of the pants excitement, Mig Alley sports a terrific strategic component, solid graphics and superb flight models.

Hello helos

Maximum Flight also satisfies the more techno-literate simmer with F/A-18 Korea and Enemy Engaged: Apache Havoc. Whilst it now looks a little dated, F/A-18 Korea set new standards as a realistic simulation when it was



It's a river, not a landing strip, you idiot.

released, albeit at the expense of gameplay. Jane's F/A-18 recently struck the right balance between the two, and I must admit that it was hard to go back.

Apache Havoc (PCPP#34, 84%) needs very little comment from me. Great mix of realism and gameplay, great visuals, solid multiplay and a good campaign structure. Add connectivity with the new Comanche Hokum, and this game is still a winner.

Major Des McNicholas

NEED FOR SPEED: PORSCHE 2000

Another NFS game? Ja, das ist gut!

DETAILS

Genre: Racing

Multiplayer: Yes

Developer: EA Sports

Publisher: EA Sports

Distributor: Electronic Arts

Available: Now

Rating: G

PCPP
75

Despite sporting all the wonder and excitement any Porsche fan could ever possibly need or want, Need For Speed: Porsche 2000 leaves one question to be asked. What if you don't like Porsche? In fact, what kind of appeal does this title have for anyone other than Porsche fans? Not a heck of a lot.

Right off the bat, the traditional - and increasingly frustrating - EA Sports menu system has made yet another comeback! And this time it's even more confusing than ever. Thankfully, this title isn't about menu navigation, it's about driving the most esteemed German made sports cars ever built.

As the name would have it, the latest in the NFS series is all about Porsche. Moving from the multi manufacturer titles of old, EA Sports has seen fit to remove much of the appeal this veteran series has held. However, if you're a Porsche fan, you are in for a treat. On offer are some of the most prestigious Porsche automobiles dating back to the

1950's. In fact, hidden within the user interface maze, Porsche 2000 offers players the thrill of racing any of the marquee's vehicles on a variety of typically arcade-style NFS circuits.

New additions to the series are abundant - the hottest of which is a brand spanking new Test Driver mode. Being a Porsche test driver is the most appealing concept to come from this series since its first appearance. On the payroll as the latest rookie factory test driver, players

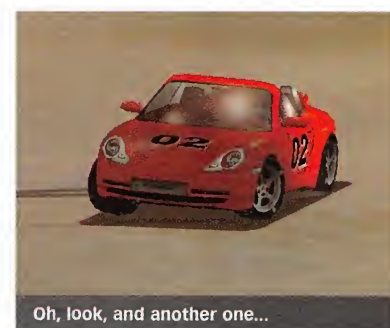
must achieve objectives, each harder than the last, with the ultimate goal being the crowning title of Ace Test Driver.

EA Sports has always been known as the game sequel kings, and due to this unique style the evolution of each title is always somewhat slow. NFS is no different. However, with the accurate vehicle physics offered by most of the game's cars, it's at least taken one step closer to that ever elusive genre of simulation.

Edward Fox



Hey, it's a Porsche!



Oh, look, and another one...

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gaming lifestyle to the fullest. Live your life the way you

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at your side.



GRAND PRIX LEGENDS

Mark Elliott kicks off our Reader Review page with a look back at a classic racing sim...



Not bad for a bathtub on wheels.



Gee, roads are a dull colour.



"cough-cough"

I know who you are. You're still playing Grand Prix 2 after all these years. In the meantime, you've tried demos of every Formula One game. The graphics were great, but they still didn't have the same feel or challenge as GP2. I too have waited, but I have found the king of racing simulators, and it is Grand Prix Legends.

Back in time

One of the great things about setting a Formula One sim during the 60s is the race tracks aren't ruined by chicanes. At Spa, Belgium, there are telegraph poles and houses zooming past at over 200kph, with no crash barriers. The long straights mean that you can get into great

down a bit. The AI is predictable, just remember to get your nose in front when turning into a corner or they will cut you off. Even now the AI cars can outbrake me.

Balancing act

Many racing games allow you to slam the brakes on, wrench the wheel and then boot it out of the corner. In GPL, just like in real life, you need to use some finesse to balance the car. When the brakes are used, the nose dips and the weight is transferred to the front wheels. Try yanking the wheel and the back will spin out. You need to get off the brakes and even use a bit of throttle to get some weight back to the rear wheels. The driving model is by far the best ever seen on a PC.

GPL supports 3dfx and Rendition out of the box, but OpenGL support has to be downloaded and is very poor, even with a TNT2. Turning the mirrors off or using the external view improves the framerate, but this is only a workaround.

Grand Prix Legends can get frustrating because it is so hard. Persevere though and it will be one of the most rewarding games you can play.

Mark Elliott

blast down a straight between a tunnel of hedges, getting airborne over the jumps

I usually drive the Ferrari - and why not? Sure the Lotus is the fastest car, albeit the trickiest to drive, but the Ferrari has that certain magic and that sound! The sound is incredible. As the revs climb the sound changes from a rumble to V12 scream, I am sure that GPL couldn't be differentiated from a recording of the real Ferrari 312.

The cockpit is the best cockpit I've seen so far. The driver's arms are always visible, turning the wheel, changing gears and even waving at - or is that abusing - other drivers? The front wheels are also visible, so you know that when you can read the words "Dunlop" the front wheels have locked up.

slipstreaming battles with other drivers. The classic Nurburgring's 174 corners are included: each lap takes about nine minutes and ends with a blast down a straight between a tunnel of hedges, getting airborne over the jumps.

In 1969 our own Sir Jack Brabham beat the likes of Jim Clark, Graham Hill, Bruce McLaren and Surtees. All the drivers are there, as are all the cars, although the Honda is called a Murasama and the Cooper is called a Coventry. An unofficial patch will soon rectify this.

The AI is very hard, even on the easiest setting. It can get very frustrating to be fighting for 12th place. I recommend getting a modification to dumb the AI

ONLINE

Eagle Woman
Alison was one of the developers of GPL. The site has history about the 1960s, utilities, easy to drive setups and more.
<http://slmracing.com/alison/gpl/>



PCPP

FOR:

- Best driving model so far.
- Great sound quality.
- Fantastic tracks.

AGAINST:

- Poor performance with OpenGL.
- Very hard.

95

SCORE LIST

THE PAST YEAR IN GAMING. INCLUDING THE **BEST FIRSTPERSON ACTION GAMES.**

GAME NAME SCORE ISSUE#

12 O'Clock High	68	#46
Abomination	81	#44
● Age of Empires 2	94	#42
Age of Wonders	84	#46
Airport Inc.	42	#48
Akuma: Demonspawn	50	#47
Allegiance	81	#50
Alpha Centauri: Alien X-fire	83	#45
Amerzone	68	#42
ANNO 1602	71	#40
Army Men Air Tactics	65	#50
Army Men In Space	66	#48
Asheron's Call	88	#50
Atlantis II	78	#50
BG: Sword Coast	76	#41
Battlecruiser 3000	72	#50
Battlezone 2	85	#48
Beetle Crazy Cup	74	#49
Braveheart	86	#42
● C&C Tiberian Sun	94	#41
Castrol Superbikes 2000	85	#42
Civ: Test of Time	81	#41
Clans	48	#42
Codename: Eagle	64	#46
Corsairs	65	#40
Cricket 2000	70	#51
Croc 2	78	#48
Crusaders of Might & Magic	75	#50
Cutthroats	67	#43
Dark Reign 2	89	#51
Darkstone	68	#42
Delta Force 2	78	#46
Descent 3: Mercenaries	65	#47

Deus Ex

Developer: Ion Storm

Publisher: Eidos

Distributor: Ozisoft

What we said then: "Am I the super-strong hand-to-hand combat specialist or the sniper expert, deadly with firearms from a distance? The technician who can disable security systems in his sleep or the thief who relies on the convenience of a lockpick? Putting it mildly, Deus Ex gives you options."

● **98% in PCPP#51**

Dick Johnson V8 Challenge	45	#46
Disciples	81	#43
Dogs of War	72	#51
Dracula	58	#47
Drakan	84	#43
Driver	71	#43
● Dungeon Keeper 2	90	#41
● Enemy Engaged	91	#50
Evolva	71	#50
F1 2000	65	#50
F22 Lightning 3	85	#40
● F/A 18 Hornet	91	#47
FA Prem. League Stars	71	#42
FIFA 2000	88	#45
Fighting Steel	80	#41
Final Fantasy VIII	77	#47
Flight Unlimited III	89	#43
Fly!	85	#42
Flying Heroes	76	#51
● Force 21	90	#42
Force Commander	58	#49
Ford Racing	72	#48



Fox Sports NBA 2000	56	#44
● Freespace 2	95	#44
Gabriel Knight III	87	#44
Gorky 17	65	#47
● GP 500	96	#43
Grand Prix World	83	#49
Grand Theft Auto 2	84	#44
Guardians of Darkness	30	#41
Gulf War: Desert Hammer	55	#45
Gunship!	89	#50

Half-Life: Opposing Force

Developer: Gearbox Software

Publisher: Sierra

Distributor: Havas Interactive

What we said then: "The Engineer is the coolest character ever. With a lit cigarette on the tip of his bottom lip, he'll light his oxy-acetylene torch and cut his way through impenetrable doors... He's one keen-marine!"

● **90% in PCPP#45**

● Heavy Gear II	93	#40
HOMM III: Armageddon's Blade	70	#45
Hidden and Dangerous	88	#41
H & D: Fight for Freedom	45	#46
● Homeworld	95	#41
I-War: Defiance	72	#44
● Imperium Galactica 2	92	#46
Indiana Jones & Infernal Machine	69	#45
Interstate '82	60	#47
Invictus	51	#48
Jagged Alliance 2	89	#42
Jane's USAF	86	#44
KA-52 Alligator	65	#48

Kingpin	86	#41
Lemmings Revolution	70	#51
Links 2000	79	#44
M25 Racer	25	#45
Madden NFL 2000	84	#44
Majesty	79	#49
Man of War II	15	#40
Martian Gothic	57	#50
Messiah	89	#48
Midtown Madness	89	#40
● Mig Alley	92	#42
Might & Magic VII	70	#40
Might & Magic VIII	55	#49
Mike Stewart's Pro Bodyboarding	34	#40
Millennium Racer	70	#50
Motocross Madness 2	85	#51
MS Flight Sim 2000	84	#44
NASCAR 3	89	#44
Nascar Revolution	35	#48
Nascar Road Racing	28	#41
Nations: Fighter Command	82	#44
NBA Inside Drive 2000	68	#46
NBA Live 2000	90	#45
Need for Speed: High Stakes	89	#41
Nerf Arena	70	#46
NHL Championship 2000	78	#46
Nocturne	79	#46
Nox	83	#48
● Omikron: Nomad Soul	93	#44
Operation Art of War 2	84	#42
Outcast	59	#40
Pandora's Box	68	#47
Panzer Elite	85	#46
● Planescape: Torment	91	#46
Pharaoh	88	#45
Phoenix	64	#46
Prince of Persia 3D	65	#43

Pro Pinball: Fantastic Journey	88	#47
Puma Street Soccer	75	#46

Quake III: Arena

Developer: id Software

Publisher: Activision

Distributor: Activision

What we said then: "Quake III: Arena is all about one thing - hard and fast multiplayer action and fragging the hell out of your opponents. Or as it says so helpfully in the manual: 'Frag Everything That Isn't You.'"

● **93% in PCPP#45**

● Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear	92	#44
Rally Championship 2000	88	#45
Rally Masters	89	#50
Rayman 2	89	#45
Re-Volt	82	#41
Revenant	82	#45
Rising Sun	82	#48
Rogue Spear	92	#44
Rollcage II	80	#50
R'coaster Tyc: Added Attractions	81	#45
Saga: Rage of the Vikings	42	#40
Sega Rally 2	68	#41
Septerra Core	84	#47
Seven Kingdoms 2	86	#44
Shadow Company	74	#44
Shadow Watch	65	#49
Shadow Man	61	#41
● Shogun: Total War	92	#50
● The Sims	90	#47
Skydive!	12	#42
Slave Zero	55	#47



Soldier of Fortune

Developer: Raven Software

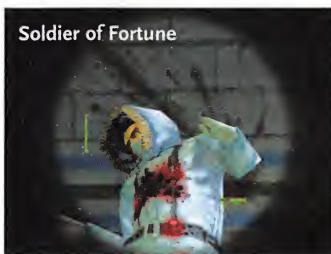
Publisher: Activision

Distributor: Activision

What we said then: "Soldier of Fortune is a pretty violent game. By comparison, Quake III is for those of a gentle disposition, and Unreal Tournament is a hospitality industry training video. A fast pace, smart enemy AI, an immersive environment, and a reasonable plot: Soldier of Fortune has all of these things."

86% in PCPP#49

Soul Reaver: Legacy Of Kain	81	#43
Soulbringer	80	#51
South Park Rally	41	#47
Spec Ops 2	60	#46
Speed Demons	55	#47
● Sports Car GT	90	#40
● Starlancer	93	#49
Star Trek: Armada	56	#49
Star Trek: Hidden Evil	69	#46
Star Trek: Starfleet Command	87	#43



SU-27 Flanker 2.0	83	#44
Superbike 2000	89	#49

SWAT 3

Developer: Sierra (in-house)

Publisher: Sierra

Distributor: Havas Interactive

What we said then: "The longterm value of SWAT 3 is dramatically increased by the fact that the locations of all suspects, hostages and civilians are randomised in each and every mission... SWAT 3 may be just what the field surgeon ordered."

● 90% in PCPP#46

System Shock 2

Developer: Irrational Games/Looking Glass Studios

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Distributor: Electronic Arts

What we said then: "System Shock 2's immersive gameplay and ingenious plot take you on an emotional rollercoaster ride that you don't ever want to get off. The terrifying sights that greet you aboard the Von Braun pierce your heart with icicles of fear..."

● 98% in PCPP#42

Theocracy	76	#49
The Wheel of Time	84	#45
● Thief Gold	96	#45

Thief II: The Metal Age

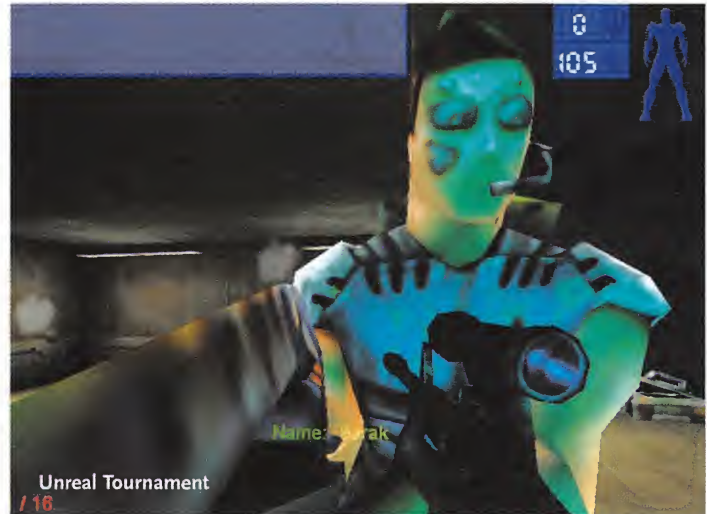
Developer: Looking Glass Studios

Publisher: Eidos

Distributor: Ozisoft

What we said then: "Although virtually all aspects of Thief II have been given impeccable treatment, it is the mission design that is its ultimate strength. Players are forced to keep their wits about them, pay close attention to their surrounds and adapt accordingly. Thief II is an exceptional piece of work."

● 95% in PCPP#49



Theme Park World	80	#45
Total Annihilation: Kingdoms	84	#40
Tiger Woods 2000	84	#49
Tomb Raider: Last Revelation	89	#43
Traitor's Gate	78	#44
UEFA Manager	79	#51
Ultima Online	68	#48
Ultima IX: Ascension	70	#45
Unreal: Return to Na Pali	72	#41

Unreal Tournament

Developer: Epic Games

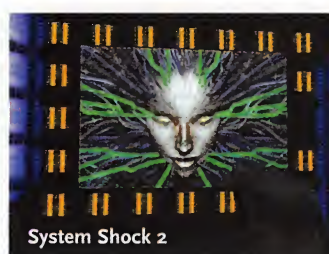
Publisher: GT Interactive

Distributor: GT Interactive/Infogrames

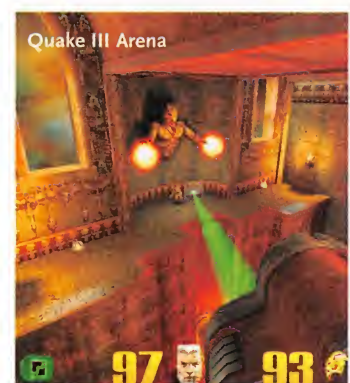
What we said then: "If you've never bothered to play multiplayer within a firstperson action environment, there's never been a better reason to start. The Mutator option means you're going to see some great stuff come out of the UT community - it's a game that will have years of replay value."

● 94% in PCPP#45

Urban Chaos	85	#46
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Wild Wild West	65	#51
World Manager	34	#48



QUIZ!

WIN YOUR CHOICE OF THE BEST OF FIRSTPERSON ACTION!

All you have to do is tell us which game this image comes from. (Clue: it's a small section of a screenshot published in PCPP.) Send to the usual competitions address, marking your envelope to "Best of Firstperson Action", and writing your answer on the back. Don't forget to tell us which game of the eight featured on these pages you would like to win. Winners notified in PCPP#54.

IN HINDSIGHT...

Shogun: Total War



AFTER MORE THAN EIGHTEEN MONTHS OF FRANTIC, NON-STOP WORK ON **SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR**, **MICHAEL DE PLATER**, THE GAME'S EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, IS DUE FOR A WELL-EARNED BREAK. BUT BEFORE HE COULD MAKE GOOD HIS ESCAPE, WE TALKED TO HIM AT LENGTH ABOUT **DREAMTIME'S GROUNDBREAKING GAME**. THANKFULLY, HE KEPT HIS SNARLING PACK OF VICIOUS CANINES IN CHECK FOR THE DURATION.



PCPP: How do you feel about the retail version of *Shogun*?

MDP: I'm very happy with it. The presentation, the packaging, the quality of the game - all these factors make me very proud. I am, of course, also glad it's finally done. Now I get a chance to take some time off!

PCPP: What was the greatest challenge the development team faced along the way?

MDP: The biggest challenge came from doing something that hasn't been done before. This made it difficult to schedule the release, and hard to know if it was ultimately going to work as a game. There was also the fact that, from about half way through the development cycle, the game became playable. So some of the guys spent a considerable amount of time going for the title of *Shogun* and battling each other in multiplayer.

PCPP: How much did the game change during development?

Or how close to its original design document did it remain?

MDP: In the end it was pretty close to the design document. The engine surpassed our expectations, so instead of having a maximum of five thousand

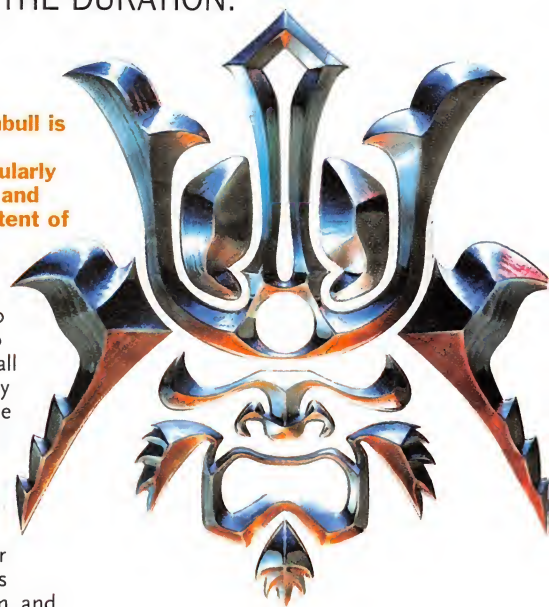


samurai in battle, you can now have eight or nine thousand. Over the course of developing a game, you have so many great ideas and exciting opportunities. So there are some aspects, such as multiplayer, where we want to do more. Post release, we will release some upgrades that will introduce interesting new features such as 'capture the flag' and 'king of the hill', as well as refinements that will bring the strategic elements into multiplayer.



PCPP: Dr Stephen Turnbull is a renowned expert on Japanese history, particularly with regard to Samurai and Ninja. What was the extent of his involvement in the development of *Shogun*?

MDP: Well, we went out to the local book store, and to Amazon.com, and bought all the books we could possibly find on Japanese history, the Samurai armies and all the traditions that go with them. We found that over half the books were written by one guy - Stephen Turnbull, who is a professor of Japanese history at Leeds University. We met with him, and discovered that not only is he Europe's foremost expert on the era of the samurai, but he is also the only Westerner ever to have a book about the Samurai translated back into Japanese! This sounded



like the kind of expertise we needed. Once we got Stephen on board, we sent him regular updates of the game for his approval. He then helped us to keep it realistic, and offered us valuable insights that made the game even cooler - which unit type should have the heaviest armour, or run fastest, etc.

PCPP: How much other research was conducted during the design and development of *Shogun*?

MDP: Everyone on the team read a great deal. The Lead AI Programmer studied Sun Tzu's 'Art Of War' in considerable depth, and the Artists studied Japanese art books and clothing (to make the characters in the FMV sequences look realistic). I read many of Stephen Turnbull's books, and also watched the Kurasawa movies.



The Director of Development at Creative Assembly, Mike Simpson, played all of those old Koei games and many board games. We also got some great Japanese actors involved, and learned about the culture of the Samurai, the mon, the flags, the colours, etc. Within the game, all the major historical figures appear, working for one faction or another. The map and resources are accurate, the troop types and tactics are accurate, and the way espionage and diplomacy play a part is accurate.

PCPP: For readers interested in this era in Japanese history, are there any specific authors, books or other sources of information that you would recommend?

MDP: Stephen Turnbull's book 'The Samurai Sourcebook' is probably the single most valuable reference. All of his books are very good. Kurasawa's films are mostly historically accurate and, of course, very good films - though they're inspirational rather than reference material. 'Secrets Of The Samurai - The Martial Arts of Feudal Japan' by Oscar Ratti and Adele Westbrook is also worth reading.



PCPP: The historical accuracy of Shogun has been stressed time and again. But was any artistic license taken in the production of some of the animated cutscenes, or any other aspects of the game?

MDP: There was quite a bit of artistic license taken in the FMVs. Or to state the case more accurately, we based the FMVs on the myths of the era, rather than the known facts. For example, it was believed that Ninja were almost invincible because they

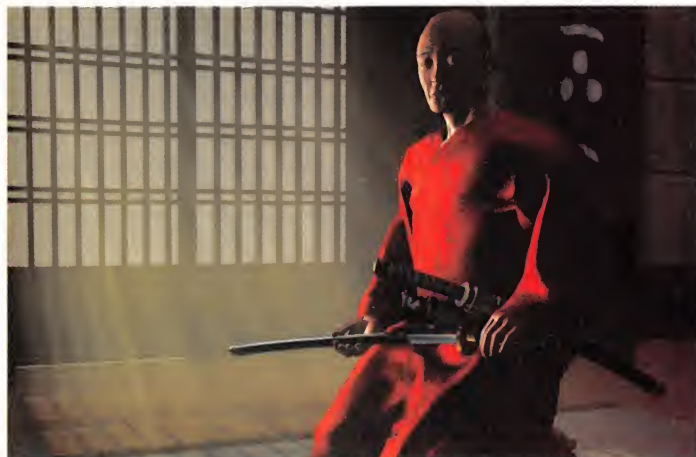
didn't bleed. In fact, their bloodshed was not visible against the dark colour of their clothing, and this made them appear God-like. In the FMVs you won't see Ninja bleeding, though you might see them die (particularly if you send an inexperienced Ninja into enemy territory).

PCPP: What's up next for Dreamtime?

MDP: Dreamtime owns the Total War brand, so we will be involved in producing, managing and marketing the next product (which will be the add-on pack). Our involvement will then continue with the sequel and so on.

PCPP: Mind if we ask you a couple more questions?

MDP: (turning to address EA Associate Producer, Ed Larossa) Release the hounds...!



SECOND TAKE

BRETT ROBINSON



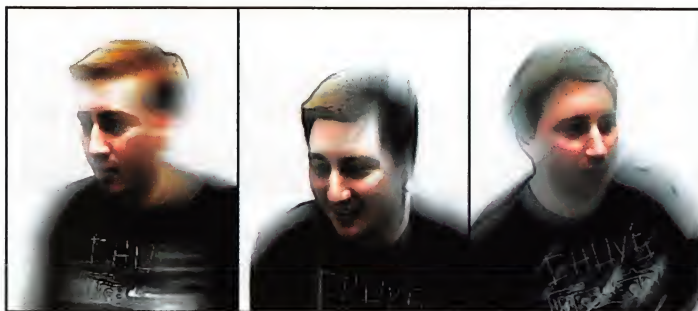
For many strategy gamers, Shogun: Total War was a breath of fresh air. Its unique hybridisation of the realtime and turn based genres delivered an experience like no other. Success in the game's strategic component demanded competent management of resources, coupled with a knack for diplomacy, ruthless subjugation and betrayal. Conversely, victory on the three dimensional battlefield required an intimate understanding of military tactics, an ability to simultaneously coordinate the movements of thousands of troops and a talent for creating cunning ambushes.

A host of highly varied playable clans, each with their own strengths and weaknesses, made for a different game every time a campaign was launched, contributing significantly to Shogun's longterm appeal. And, with infinitely cool units like Ninja and Geisha at the player's disposal, using underhanded tactics to further one's agenda held a decidedly nefarious appeal. With several upgrades for the game's multiplayer capabilities on the way, and an expansion pack due in the near future, Shogun is certain to remain on many a hard drive for quite some time. Proof positive that Australian developers are still industry leaders in the innovation stakes.



FLASHBACK WITH...

Harvey Smith



COMPANY ION STORM PROJECT LEAD DESIGNER ON DEUS EX

1. ADVENTURE

Yes, the old Atari cartridge. At a time when most games were arcade games, there was something a little bit different about Adventure. Sure, part of it still involved memorising mazes and using manual dexterity to defeat monsters (slaying the Dragon, trying to avoid the Bat). But there was also something else about it - some sense of exploring. Game elements were randomised, there were secrets. In the game, your character was a single-color 'square'. We've come a long way, baby.

2. DUNGEON MASTER

Let me say that in 1987 Dungeon Master changed my life. I spent several months playing the game over and over, learning every hallway as if it were my home. Many nights I sat in the dark for twelve hours straight, occasionally crying out in surprise, my left hand icy from gripping the mouse for so long. Dungeon Master was a masterpiece, completely focused on the innovative elements that made it cool and way ahead of its time.



3. CARRIER COMMAND

Carrier Command was this beautiful game. Simple, yet deep. You controlled a powerful aircraft carrier from the first person POV, trying to build bases on islands in a chain. Your supply network had to remain unbroken along the chain or your resources started to suffer. Meanwhile, a prototype AI-driven carrier - superior to your own - was on the other end of the chain, creating its own bases. Both carriers could launch small fighters and amphibious vehicles. Carrier Command was a great blend of resource management, sim, base construction and POV tactical combat all at realtime (way prior to games like C&C and its clones, Uprising or the most recent incarnation of Battlezone).

4. UNDERWORLD

Forget about the fact that most of the world only thinks about the obvious game titles when someone mentions firstperson games. Before Wolfenstein (by several months, I think), Looking Glass and Origin released Underworld. It was, in a word, revolutionary. Its 3D world



seemed alive, with plants growing on muddy riverbanks, rats creeping through the mossy halls and the gloom making itself a constantly felt presence. Not only was it a cool RPG/immersive sim, but Underworld also let you interact with the game environment in ways that took years to catch on elsewhere - looking up/down, swimming, jumping and even flying were all critical parts of the game. All of this blended together to serve in the name of immersion. Underworld made you react to its environment as if you were actually there.

5. EL-FISH

I know it's an odd choice, but I love games that allow me to A) create something and B) interact with artificial life. Before that time, software toys like Activision's Little Computer People had given me some of the same cool experiences. And after El-Fish, software toys like Galapagos and The Sims have taken the genre even further. But El-Fish stands out in my head as a brilliant piece of entertainment software.

6. DUNE 2

Wow - the first RTS I ever played. Hearing canned voice feedback issued up from my troops, based on their state, was awesome. Being able to play three different sides (which Starcraft did well much later) was great too. Dune 2 was enthralling and fun.



7. DOOM

To play Doom in co-op mode, with three good friends, all within screaming distance, is a multiplayer gaming experience that has, in my mind, never been rivalled. Back at Origin, the cubicle/office set-up was perfect for this activity. Late at night we would gather in a cubicle "pit," each player with his back to the others, his monitor positioned in one of the corners of the pit.



We're fire it up and start at the beginning, monsters cranked up to Nightmare mode. We're scream and laugh and fight our way past the demons. Usually, everyone played nice; occasionally you caught a "friend's" rocket in the back.

8. X-COM

X-Com holds a special place in my heart. It caused the player to develop an RPG-like connection with the characters in his squad. It allowed the player to track the statistics of his squad members and even rename them. X-Com also created amazingly detailed and interactive maps. You could destroy any part of a map solid-walls, doors, trashcans, windows, etc. Its atmospheric appeal was one of its strongest features - darkness lent the game edge and the real-world setting, like suburban neighbourhoods, was very compelling.

9. SYSTEM SHOCK

Back when I was a game tester, I had the chance to work on System Shock. Essentially, my job involved playing the game and reporting to the development team for ten months straight. I never got tired of Shock; there was always something new to see

or do. It added to Underworld's suite of interaction tools with environmental features like wacky gravity zones, hover-skate motion physics, leaning around corners, crouching, moving in drunken slow-motion. As the player, you were all alone in Citadel Station, a really spooky place. SHODAN, your AI nemesis, was like a spiritual presence within the station, taunting you, sending out its agents to ambush you and seemingly watching you from every corner through its many eyes (the game's ubiquitous security cameras). The game was an immersive shooter with RPG/adventure game elements. You had to sneak around in order to survive, which made for an extremely suspenseful experience. Playing a game by Looking Glass was pretty much like looking into the future of virtual reality.

10. ADVENTURE GAMES

Adventure games, while fraught with problems as a genre, have still consumed a bunch of my time in good ways over the years. Space Quest 1-3, King's Quest, HeroQuest, Bureau 13 and Blade Runner are just a few of the adventure games that I have really enjoyed.



THE ARCHIVE

FOUR YEARS AS AUSTRALIA'S AUTHORITY ON PC GAMING

PCPP#1
MAY 1996

Duke Nukem adorned the launch issue of PC PowerPlay, inside of which could be found a preview on Duke's most famous exploits. Sitting alongside it in the previews section was a first look at the three-level test release of Quake. This period in mid-1996 could be marked down as a defining moment for firstperson shooters. While Duke himself always played it tongue-in-cheek, when both he and Quake arrived on the scene the competition suddenly got very serious indeed. Over fifty issues later, one look at the rivalry between Quake 3 and Unreal Tournament is enough to realise that little has changed.



REVIEWS

GRAND PRIX 2 (9/10), DESCENT 2 (9/10), CIVILIZATION II (9/10)

QUOTES

"Quake will still offer probably the greatest one player action experience yet."

- Well, it was only a test demo.

MY FIRST GAME

WITH EDWARD FOX



RIVER RAID ATARI 2600

I remember when I first saw the life-draining device that would overcome my very existence for the next few years. The Atari 2600 was, at the time, the world's number one gaming machine, and this six year old rookie was about to get his first taste of the electronic entertainment world! Sitting neatly beside the single button, eight direction joystick, I spotted it: River Raid - a game which could be considered second only to Wizard of Wor at the time. River Raid offered (albeit extremely basically) the first every experience of virtual flight! Needless to say, many of my nights from there on in would be occupied by hour long vigils at the cockpit of my FA-18 blasting up the River!



Contributions to MY 1ST GAME are welcome. Send 100 words and a pic of the game (or game box) to: letters@pcpowerplay.next.com.au with "MY 1ST GAME" in the subject line.

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- Panzer General 3D
 - Panzer General Assault 2
 - Flanker 2.0
- Close Combat 4
- Warhammer: Rites of War
 - Battle Collection
 - Fighting Steel
 - Imperialism II
- Ultimate World War II Game Collection
 - Prince of Persia 3D
- Warlords III: Darklords Rising
- Journeyman Project Trilogy
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*Note: some games not pictured.

Our very special thanks goes to Mattel Interactive for making this competition possible.

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NEXT-GEN 3D SHOWDOWN

VOODOO 5 VERSUS GEFORCE 2



IT'S AN EXCITING TIME FOR THE GRAPHICS INDUSTRY: AS PART OF THE YEARLY PRODUCT CYCLE, THE CURRENT MARKET LEADERS, **3DFX INTERACTIVE AND NVIDIA**, HAVE RELEASED THEIR LATEST ÜBER-VIDEOCARDS. THERE ARE ALSO OTHER NEWCOMERS EXPECTED LATER THIS YEAR - THE ATI RADEON AND THE IMAGINATION TECHNOLOGIES KRYO CHIPSET. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE 3DFX **VOODOO 5 5500** AND THE NVIDIA **GEFORCE 2 GTS** ARE ON SHELVES NOW.

ALTHOUGH ALL OF THE NEXT-GENERATION CARDS ARE SCANDALOUSLY EXPENSIVE, THEY DO REPRESENT THE ABSOLUTE BLEEDING-EDGE OF COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY. TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THAT PERFORMANCE ISN'T EVERYTHING WHEN MAKING **AN INTELLIGENT PURCHASING DECISION**; SOME FACTORS WHICH OUGHT TO BE CONSIDERED INCLUDE STABILITY, IMAGE QUALITY, DRIVERS AND PRODUCT LIFESPAN.

BY HUGH NORTON-SMITH

■ Amazing effects

The GeForce 2 GTS is more than an enhanced GeForce 256. Besides being almost three times as fast as its predecessor, the Nvidia engineers have implemented a revised Transform and Lighting engine, as well as the all-new GigaTexel Shader system (hence the GTS part of the GeForce 2 GTS name).

GTS embraces a radically different method of rendering: instead of using interpolation, the card actually does per pixel drawing. This means that there are seven operations per pixel per pass, making for some amazingly convincing effects. This is accomplished via the Nvidia Shading Rasterizer (NSR), and it's the first card on the market to handle graphics on a per-pixel basis.

Although the GTS feature can have a huge impact upon game visuals, it is a lot like hardware Transform and Lighting - game

designers need to write code specifically to take advantage of these features. In addition, the GeForce 2 GTS also incorporates a special video processor (the HDVP) for HDTV support and a TMDS for flat-panel display support.

■ No jaggies

Nvidia also claims that the GeForce 2 GTS comes with hardware support for Full Screen Anti-Aliasing (FSAA) via a method known as 'SuperSampling'. As regular readers will know, FSAA essentially eliminates the jagged edges (often known as 'jaggies') that are prominent in many games, particularly racing games and flight sims. FSAA doesn't require games to be written specifically to support it, as it operates at an API level.

At best, the Nvidia driver support for FSAA (as of reference driver 5.25) is flaky. The Direct3D execution is especially dubious, with

most games suffering from horrendous graphical glitches, or refusing to operate altogether with the feature enabled. It is also miserably slow. In sum, until Nvidia works on its drivers further, FSAA on GeForce boards is almost useless.

On the other hand, the Voodoo5 5500 has a considerably better method of FSAA, known as 'subpixel jittering.' Although not flawless, this technique is significantly faster and less bug-riddled than Nvidia's SuperSampling.

Ultimately, it comes down to whether you want to run at very high resolutions on the Nvidia board, or run at lower resolutions on the 3dfx board with FSAA enabled. Suffice to say, FSAA on the 3dfx board is gorgeous - even at a comparatively low-resolution, say 800x600, the Voodoo5 with FSAA looks infinitely better than the GeForce 2 GTS at resolutions as high as 1600x1200.



Full scene anti-aliasing is one of the best features on both the Voodoo5 and GeForce2. It smooths out the edges on the polygons, giving a more natural look.

Multi-chip

Unlike the GeForce 2 GTS, the 5500 is a multi-chip solution. It is endowed with a pair of VSA-100 fully programmable processors, each of which is allocated 32Mb of RAM. For the near future, all 3dfx cards will feature these chips, which are hugely scalable; 3dfx has stated that up to 32 VSA-100 chips can be used simultaneously. Obviously, this is only feasible for the high-end graphics workstation market, so don't expect a Voodoo card to be released with 32 on-board chips!

Since they're fully programmable, the VSA-100 doesn't need to be configured in the familiar SLI mode, although this is possible. Instead, each chip can be programmed to individually process different parts of the rendered scene.

For instance, if there is a particularly detailed operation occurring in the top-third of the screen, then one processor can be dedicated to that area alone, whilst the other handles the remaining two-thirds. With the chips working in tandem, the Voodoo5 5500 has an on-paper output of 667 megapixels/second, in full 32-bit colour. It even allows for textures as large as 2K by 2K.

In addition to the chip programmability, 3dfx has added many new features to its latest line of videocards. Most notable is the aforementioned full-screen anti-aliasing, but other impressive features include: a T-buffer for performing Hollywood-style effects such as depth of field, motion blur, and soft shadows and reflections; and texture compression using both DirectX and 3dfx's own FXT1 texture compression algorithm.

Performance

There is no question that the Nvidia card is faster than the Voodoo5 5500, although at high resolutions the competition is close. Realistically, the Voodoo5 5500 is more comparable to the original GeForce 256 in terms of raw grunt. Regardless, both cards are more than sufficiently equipped to handle the next-generation of games, with all the bells and whistles turned on!

Stability

Although Nvidia releases/leaks new drivers on an almost fortnightly basis, its drivers have rather a shabby reputation for stability. The fact that they only manufacture the chipset, and leave the board design to Taiwanese component manufacturers, often introduces inconsistencies. Also, GeForce cards have major motherboard incompatibilities, particularly when using Via or Intel LX chipsets.

Because 3dfx has direct control over the manufacturing of the boards themselves, the drivers are tightly-tuned to the hardware. Importantly, the addition of an internal power lead ensures that the card doesn't have to rely on the troublesome AGP slot for voltage.

QUAKE III ARENA BENCHMARKS

640 x 480 x 16

Voodoo5 5500: 69fps

GeForce 2 GTS: 80fps

1600 x 1200 x 16

Voodoo5 5500: 41fps

GeForce 2 GTS: 46fps

640 x 480 x 32

Voodoo5 5500: 65fps

GeForce 2 GTS: 78fps

1600 x 1200 x 32

Voodoo5 5500: 25fps

GeForce 2 GTS: 23fps

NOTE: All tests were conducted on Gateway Pentium III-650 with 128Mb of RAM. Quake3 was run with all the effects on full, including high-geometry, trilinear filtering, etc.



THE ID VERDICT

John Carmack, Lead Programmer at id Software speaks:

"The real unique feature of the Voodoo5 is subpixel jittering during rasterization, which can't reasonably be emulated by other hardware. This does indeed improve the quality of anti-aliasing.

"Nvidia will probably continue to hit the best framerates in benchmarks at low resolution, because they have flexible hardware with geometry acceleration and well-tuned drivers... GeForce is my baseline for current rendering work, so I can wholeheartedly recommend it..."

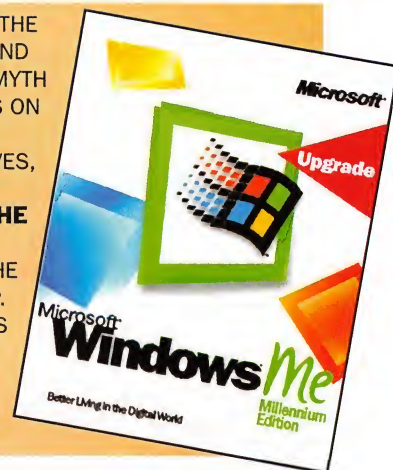


Look at the three shots at the top of the page then take a look at these. Note the difference that FSAA makes? All the ugly "jaggies" here are eliminated.

WINDOWS ME VERSUS WINDOWS 2000

THE GAMING OS

WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT, **MICROSOFT** WINDOWS IS THE ONLY CHOICE FOR THE SERIOUS GAMER. ALTHOUGH LINUX AND MACOS MIGHT SPORT THEIR OWN PORTS OF *QUAKE 3* AND *MYTH II*, THEY CAN'T BEGIN TO OFFER THE CORNUCOPIA OF GAMES ON OFFER FOR THE WIN32 PLATFORM. WHILE THE FUTURE MAY WITNESS INCREASED ACCEPTANCE OF WINDOWS ALTERNATIVES, DRIVEN PRIMARILY BY THE ABM (ANYONE BUT MICROSOFT) ZEALOTS, WINDOWS **WILL CONTINUE TO DOMINATE THE MARKET FOR SOME TIME**. AND, EVEN WHILE THE COURTS SQUABBLE OVER THE FINAL FATE OF MICROSOFT, THE COMPANY IS STILL EXPANDING AND DEVELOPING ITS LINE-UP. THIS YEAR, MICROSOFT HAS RELEASED TWO NEW PRODUCTS - **WINDOWS 2000** AND THE AMUSINGLY TITLED **WINDOWS ME**. NEEDLESS TO SAY, THERE HAS BEEN MUCH DEBATE UPON THEIR RELATIVE MERIT. WHICH ONE FOR THE DISCERNING GAMER? READ ON.



BY HUGH NORTON-SMITH

WINDOWSME

Windows Me, aka Windows Millennium Edition, has just gone gold, and although there is a significant manufacturing lead-up before release, the OS should be available on Thursday 14th September here in Australia. Priced the same as Windows 98, Windows Me is the first iteration of the perennially popular OS that is designed specifically for the consumer market, and is also the last operating OS based around the aging Winx kernel. In many ways this makes it just a dressed-up Windows 98.



Despite the anti-trust ruling, Windows Me takes system integration to a new level: with built-in versions of DirectX 7, MediaPlayer 7 and Internet Explorer 5.5, Windows Me is bound to raise eyebrows at the Justice Department who claim that Microsoft's practice of bundling new products into Windows stifles competition and innovation. Regardless, Windows Me does offer some promising bells and whistles. Microsoft execs have been saying forever that they intend to make Windows easier to use. So far, we've seen little evidence. But five Windows Me features suggest we're finally seeing progress:

■ Restoring PC health

If you've ever downloaded a program or installed a driver that's wreaked havoc on your system, you can appreciate the idea of being able to turn back the clock. The System Restore function, which already features on some brand-name computers, lets you pick a date in the past and restore your PC to the way it was functioning then. Quite invaluable.

■ Digital media enhancements

The new OS is more nimble when editing digital pictures, video and music. Take into consideration the newfound interest in mp3, DivX and digital cameras, and you can understand Microsoft's motivation. Like the iMac DV, Windows Me will also allow you to view digital pictures straight from the camera, as well as store and retrieve movies from a digital camcorder. Integrated firewire support will let you transfer videos at previously unheard of speeds.

■ Home Networking

Configuring the various networking protocols has always been a bit of an esoteric art - thankfully, Windows Me's integrated networking wizard aims to take the difficulty out of setting up a home network. With an increasing amount of people owning more than one computer at home, home LANs are gaining popularity. Microsoft hopes to set the

standard for home networking with its Universal Plug and Play technology.

■ Improved online experience

Much to the chagrin of Netscape and the US Department of Justice, Internet Explorer 5.5 will be integrated into Windows ME. IE 5.5 renders pages faster as well as allowing you to preview them prior to printing.

■ Faster boot up

Microsoft claims a Dell computer will boot Windows ME in less than 30 seconds. For Winx users who are continually restarting their computers, this could prove very useful.

We've been playing with Release Candidate 2 of Windows Me for some time. In sum, we've been somewhat underwhelmed by the new Operating System. Although it is notably more stable than Windows 98 SE, it lacks the raw grunt and system robustness of Windows 2000. We're not entirely convinced you need to rush out and replace Windows 98. Indeed, many of you will be better off skipping Me entirely and moving to Windows 2000. Despite the grand name, Windows Me is less an OS for the new century and more a milestone upgrade. Regardless, if you're upgrading your whole machine or buying a new one, the added features of Windows Me make it a worthy option for the less experienced user.



WINDOWS 2000 PROFESSIONAL

Although the name might suggest that Windows 2000 is the successor to Windows 98, it is actually the latest incarnation of Windows NT. Indeed, Windows 2000 was originally known as Windows NT 5. Unlike Windows NT, however, Windows 2000 includes decent multimedia support - the OS comes with DirectX 6 built-in, which is a blessing for gamers. In fact, despite assertions to the contrary, Windows 2000 will run almost all Win32 games perfectly.

Thankfully, they've also incorporated proper plug-and-play support into the revised kernel. That brings us to one of the big issues about Windows 2000: whether or not 2000 has support for the hardware in your PC. Windows 2000 requires a new set of drivers, and many legacy devices may never be supported.

Windows 2000 comes with a host of new improvements. We've outlined a few of the more important additions:

■ Faster Performance

Based around the same technology that underpins Windows NT, Windows 2000 is a seriously powerful and versatile operating system. According to Microsoft, Windows 2000

is 25% faster than Windows 9x on systems with 64Mb or more of memory. Whether you believe that exact figure or not, it's certainly true that many Windows 2000 users will notice a significant performance improvement when they switch to the new operating system. This is largely due to the ultra-efficient memory management and file system of Windows 2000. Moreover, Windows 2000 Professional is highly scalable, with the ability to handle up to 2Gb of memory and two processors operating in tandem (SMP).

■ Improved Multitasking

Windows 2000 uses a fully 32-bit architecture, unlike the hybrid 16/32-bit system used in Windows 9x. Although every processor since the 386 has the ability to execute 32-bit programs, the P6 architecture, featured in the Pentium Pro and Pentium III, was designed specifically for a 32-bit environment. Besides the added performance, a 32-bit interface allows you to run more programs and perform more tasks at the same time than with Windows 98 or Millennium.

■ Better Stability

As you may know, Windows Operating Systems

still rely upon clunky MS-DOS to operate. Microsoft did away with this when designing Windows NT, as the NT kernel was designed chiefly for business applications. Windows 2000 is meant to work in mission-critical business environments: there is an emphasis on system stability. Windows 2000 rarely crashes, as programs that hang within NT don't bring the whole system down. As with Linux, you can leave Windows 2000 running for protracted amounts of time. You really can't do that with Windows Millennium, due to the frequent memory leaks and the lack of a genuine Hardware Abstraction Layer (HAL).

Summary

If you can afford the additional expenditure, and aren't running any funky old hardware, Windows 2000 is definitely worth a look. Ultimately, however, it is quite feasible to run several operating systems on the same computer, as long as you have sufficient disk space and a copy of Partition Magic. In this way, you can use the OS that best suits the task at hand. For instance, my computer sports Windows Me, Windows 2000 and RedHat Linux in their own separate partitions.

ALTEC LANSING APT3 Speakers

DISTRIBUTOR INNOVISION (03) 9817 7988

Altec Lansing is one of the few PC speaker manufacturers that has been consistently producing quality products since multimedia became a viable option for home systems. Now that three speaker systems are the norm and we're moving towards 5.1 (that is 5 discrete audio channels and a subwoofer channel) and 6.1 channel digital packages, a three-speaker setup must be fairly special to stand out. Fortunately for Altec, the ATP3 is.

The first thing you'll notice about the ATP3 system is its unique design. The two satellite speakers consist of two flattened-dome (or flat panel) microdrivers on an aesthetically pleasing but apparently useless base. On further inspection the base actually contains a 3-inch mid-range driver, making the speakers a hybrid of flat panel and conventional technology. The subwoofer is a more familiar box with a stylish moulded shape.

Speakers are not there merely to be admired, however, and style should never take the place of substance. Altec Lansing seems to have created a unique balance. The satellites churn out 12 watts per channel and the subwoofer produces 18 watts, bringing the total RMS for the speaker set to 36 watts. This may seem a little underpowered, and while you won't have the neighbours calling the police, the speakers can produce enough raw volume for all but the most masochistic gamers.

What the ATP3 lacks in power is made up for in sound quality. The speakers produce delicious tones through the entire audible range. The bass is especially impressive, showing far more detail than the small size of the subwoofer suggests.

This makes the speakers perfect for gaming - a rocket roaring overhead really makes you want to duck for cover and you may actually believe you're leading Michael Schumacher into the last straight at Monte Carlo.

One concern due to the downward firing cones is that 3D audio could be compromised. As long as the satellites are well placed, positional and environmental sounds are accurate and convincing. Further design points go to Altec Lansing for placing all of the controls on the satellite. It can be frustrating to have to clamber under your desk just so that you can adjust the bass level.



Overall this is an excellent speaker set, especially for the price. Unless you decide that surround speakers are for you, this is a very capable package that sounds absolutely fantastic, looks the part and won't monopolise your desk space.

Sebastian Fern

CREATIVE Sound Station

DISTRIBUTOR CREATIVE LABS (02) 9666 6100

So you won't win any style awards using this thing, and you may find yourself the butt of many a joke amongst friends and neighbours. But damnit: don't let the fear of ridicule from a bunch of clueless know-it-alls prevent you from experiencing this ingenious (and absolutely bloody basic) piece of gaming periphery.

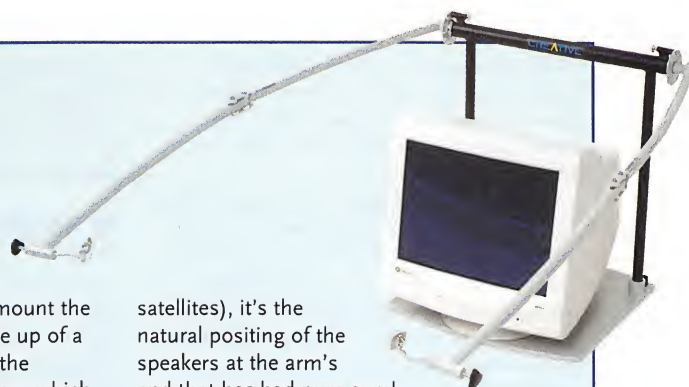
Put simply, the Creative SoundStation is a rigging system for your four/five piece surround sound speaker system, replacing the tape/glue/

wire/blu-tack combo often used to mount the rear speakers behind the head. Made up of a sturdy and weighted base on which the monitor sits and a rigging system from which the speaker arms extend, the SoundStation is a marvel. Speaker cables can be threaded through the tubes, keeping the entire setup clean and tidy.

But while this solution is perfect for keeping your surround speaker setup in order (no more stray cables and precariously perched

satellites), it's the natural positing of the speakers at the arm's end that has had pure aural ecstasy coursing through our veins. The adjustable arms can place the rear speakers directly behind your head, enveloping you within a surround sound bubble - a magical experience with games using 3D sound. Absolutely recommended.

March Stepnik



MAD CATZ Andretti Steering Wheel

DISTRIBUTOR HES (02 9533 3055)

Mad Catz has, over the last few years, stamped its name firmly on the PC gaming peripherals market. Without the groundbreaking efforts of stables such as Thrustmaster and Logitech, Mad Catz has always been considered the best option when value for money is the deciding factor.

The wheel itself is made from a hard rubber and contoured on the backside for a comfortable grip. The thickness of the wheel is a bit wanting and combined with the hardness texture, was causing my hands to sweat during those marathon sessions of Grand Prix Legends. An extra layer of padding would have solved this problem, but even so, the wheel is quite comfortable for prolonged periods of use as long as you have something to wipe your hands on during the straights.

All of the buttons, including the hat, are within comfortable reach and are as easy to use as they are to configure. With this apparent ergonomically paradise, there is however a downside: the stem of the wheel protrudes from the base of the unit by only about one and half inches, which is nowhere near enough clearance for my long fingers to wrap around the wheel correctly.



As a result, my knuckles we're badly beaten by the edges of the base during those furious racing sessions. (Readers should be aware that Edward suffers from overly large hands - Ed.)

The pedals sport a large degree of play and tension, which is perfect for those racing titles that demand the utmost precision from the throttle and brake. A 1-inch bolt with a tension spring holds the pedal in an upright position and because of the spring you can angle the pedal down to a different angle as is comfortable. The bolt and spring also provides some play in the horizontal positioning of the pedals. The entire

mechanism feels quite durable, but also looks as if you could easily replace any of the parts if they were to break or wear out. The 4 buttons and the hat-switch on the wheel are easily accessible and you can either use the 2 position shift lever or the twin butterfly shift buttons on the back of the wheel for changing gears.

To conclude, the Andretti Racing Wheel isn't exactly the best wheel money can buy, but it's certainly the best value.

Edward Fox

MICROSOFT Sidewinder Plug'n'Play

DISTRIBUTOR MICROSOFT

This is the "light" version of the MS Sidewinder Game Pad Mark II: a no frills piece smaller in size and lighter in dials and switches. There are four action buttons on the front, with two "trigger" buttons on the back of the unit (used by the index fingers). In comparison, the regular Sidewinder Pad features six action buttons as well as a menu/pause button.

The smaller size is perfect for younger players, and the minimalist design may be a welcome alternative to those put off by the many "space age" pads - where manual perusal may be necessary to learn to use - available these days. Of note in its design is the angled directional thumb pad, which has been skewed to correspond with the natural direction of the hand and fingers on each paddle. This one's a comfortable pad.

The MS Sidewinder PnP uses a USB connector, incidentally.



March Stepnik

USBBUG and AudioBug

DISTRIBUTOR 5D PRODUCTS

For budget-conscious gamers with a fetish for USB peripherals, 5D's USBBug will be just what the doctor ordered. At half the price of most USB Hubs, the 4-port USBBug also represents tremendous value for money. And for audiophiles tired of crawling behind their tower cases to connect and disconnect cables, the AudioBug makes things a lot easier by bringing the cables within easy reach. Both peripherals come in a wide range of colours, and can be ordered from www.5d-products.com.



Virtual Reality

DISTRIBUTOR: MINDFLUX

VFX3D Interactive Personal Display

The VFX3D is something straight out of The Lawnmower Man. Essentially it's a dual LCD stereoscopic headset which includes a set of stereo headphones and sensors to detect the movement of your head. This is the kind of technology that we were promised in the mid-nineties but then seemed to fade away. The idea behind this system is very, very cool and the headset performs to its promises. 3D applications - and



especially games - are displayed stereoscopically (so that they appear to be truly 3D) and movement is controlled entirely by motion sensors in the helmet and with the optional Cyber Puck controller. The VFX3D provides a truly immersive experience. The system is let down, however, by poor ergonomics and the fact that production costs have forced the use of low-resolution LCD panels.

Elsa 3D Relevator Glasses

Elsa's Relevator Glasses are now available separately and can be used with any videocard based on an Nvidia chipset, from the TNT to the GeForce2 GTS. By using



software to provide different pictures for each eye at a 120Hz refresh rate it appears to the brain that a picture with true depth of field is being displayed at 60Hz. This effect takes a while to get used to but once you have focused, the visuals are truly astounding. The basic model is attached to your system using a special VGA adaptor. The version we looked at, however, comes with an infrared adaptor giving you the freedom of a cordless setup. Unfortunately the glasses only work in Direct3D games and can be uncomfortable after a period of use; nevertheless the results well and truly make up for any discomfort.

Sebastian Fern

THE BEAST

AN ULTIMATE RIG BY HUGH NORTON-SMITH



The Beast represents what the PC PowerPlay crew recommends you buy if money were no obstacle. In short, the most nitro-burning, hard-rocking computer system this side of a Silicon Graphics Onyx2 RealityMonster. (Yes, it does exist!)

CPU: Dual Pentium III 933 EB SMP

The 1GHz Pentium III processors are almost impossible to find. They are also insanely expensive (even for the God box), and require elaborate cooling to remain stable. The Pentium III 933 offers similar performance, at a much more reasonable price. With two of these babies, you'll thrash any single processor system in Quake3. When the Athlon goes dual, we'll give it consideration!

MOTHERBOARD: SuperMicro P6DBE

One of the few motherboards that supports dual Pentium III 'Coppermine' processors, and up to 1GB of RAM! Designed as a server motherboard, the SuperMicro P6DBE is renowned for its stability.

RAM: 256 MB KingMaxx TinyBGA PC133 SDRAM

256MB should keep your computer satisfied for

some time. You'll also be able to do some serious multitasking! The PC133 standard is critical for a system that is based on a 133MHz Front Side Bus.

HARD DRIVE: Quantum Fireball 28GB CM

Unlike the KX, the Quantum CM has an impressive 2 MB cache. It also features the ATA/66 interface, and a spindle speed of 7,200RPM.

VIDEOCARD: Asus V6800 Deluxe

Although it only (!) has 32MB of DDR texture memory, the V6800 Deluxe has the most complete feature set of any videocard. This includes TV-In/Out, as well as 3D glasses and a DVD software decoder.

SOUNDCARD: Creative Labs SB Live! Platinum

The Sound Blaster Live! Platinum package includes the highly successful SB Live! Card, as well as the Live Drive II optical interface and a massive software package.

MONITOR: Sony G500 21" Trinitron

Able to pull off 2048x1536, this'll impress the mates. Particularly when coupled with a capable videocard like the Asus V6800.

WARTORN™

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS SETUP



DANIEL RUTTER WAXES TECHNICAL

WRITE TO:

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When you write remember to include as much pertinent information as possible. Send your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT and any associated *.INI files for Windows that might tell me more about your problem. Give me as detailed an explanation as you can and be sure to include as much detail as possible about your PC. Feel free to email your questions or, if you want to snail mail, please remember to write clearly or better still print your letters. Please note that due to the volume of messages we receive, we cannot guarantee a response to your queries.

MORE SPANISH WASHING POWDER QUESTIONS

Q> In regards to the "K7 conundrum" letter in PCPP#47 - it says in the reply that the FSB for the Athlon is 200MHz, even though it only travels at 100MHz but does it twice. However the reply then says something about the processor's bus to main memory is only 100MHz. How can its FSB be 200MHz but only access the RAM at 100MHz?

Also, apparently the Athlon only accesses its cache at half the CPU speed. Is this going to change to being full speed like the Celeron, and if so any ideas as to when?

Finally is there going to be any real gain from replacing PC100 RAM with PC133 RAM, or is it better to wait and get a motherboard that can support RDRAM? Also, can you presently get an Athlon motherboard that supports RDRAM, and if so, which one?

Mr. Black, Email

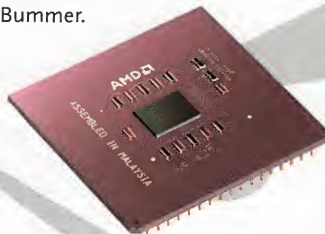
A> Stop looking at me like that. "Athlon" IS, apparently, a brand of Spanish washing powder. It must be true: I read it on www.theregister.co.uk.

The Athlon does, indeed, clock-double its RAM bus speed to get its chipset-to-CPU speed. 100MHz to RAM, 200MHz from chipset to CPU. Thanks to the heavy caching done by desktop processors and the relatively RAM bandwidth insensitive tasks they do, this strategy works quite well. It also gives a really fast CPU-to-CPU connection for multiprocessor systems, but you'll not be able to build any of those with current Athlons.

And yes, the cache of original model Athlons runs, at most, at half the speed of the processor core, as mentioned in the reply to last month's Letter Of The Month, which you of course have now subsequently read, because you do not want me to do something to you with a cheese-wire.

And also yes, single-chip, on-die cache Athlons certainly are coming -

actually, they ought to be available by the time you read this. The "Thunderbird" Athlon is, broadly, AMD's equivalent of the "Coppermine" P-III, except it currently seems likely to need a new kind of motherboard - your old Slot A Athlon board won't work with the Thunderbird, because AMD apparently won't be MAKING Slot A Thunderbirds for the retail market. This is because their testing revealed that Slot A Thunderbirds didn't bloom in well work with VIA chipset motherboards. Bummer.



AMD has also come up with a Celeron-equivalent, called the Duron, which seems likely to blow the Celeron into the weeds performance-wise. And which ALSO needs a new kind of motherboard. Thankfully, the Thunderbird and the Duron will both work on the SAME kinds of boards, using AMD's new "Socket A" - a square socket like Intel's Socket 370 but with more pins.

Duron, of course, was a Spanish composer of the 17th and early 18th centuries, but you knew that. It's also a brand name used by prophylactic maker Durex, for a particularly... sensitive... kind of polyurethane. On the subject of Rambus's much-vaunted RDRAM - you don't want it. Heck, INTEL don't want it, but they're stuck with it; they built their 820 and 840 chipsets around the darn stuff, and they have had NOTHING but misery from this stunningly expensive, not very fast, proprietary RAM technology. Not even the benchmark figures on Rambus's own site can make RDRAM look exciting. Go and look for yourself -

http://www.rambus.com/products/products_benchmark_820.html. The bandwidth numbers look great, but

the best Rambus can manage over the far cheaper PC133 SDRAM is an 18% performance gain. For professional applications, it only beats PC133 by 10%.

No Athlon motherboard will ever use RDRAM. Towards the end of this year, though, we should see Athlon boards that use Dual Data Rate (DDR) RAM, for TWICE the previous data rate at a MUCH smaller price premium than Rambus memory commands.

WHY COMPUTER NO WORK?

Q> My computer won't start up; it won't even get past the BIOS. When I press the power button all the lights come on but the screen is just black. I think it's either the hard drive or the motherboard; what do you think? Is it possible for a virus to infect the BIOS and stop the computer from starting up?

Corey Brazendale, Email

A> Various things can cause Paperweight PC Syndrome. The simplest and cheapest (i.e. hope that this is the problem...) is a dead Power Supply Unit (PSU), where one rail's gone out - lose the 3.3V rail, for instance, and the drives will still be powered but the CPU won't be. Or your CPU could be toast. Or your CPU could have been bounced half out of its socket (possible, if it was never quite clipped in right to start with). Or your motherboard could, as you say, be knackered. Or your BIOS could, as you say, be damaged; yes, some viruses (like CIH) can overwrite BIOS data. You'll get the same symptoms if you lose power in the middle of flashing a new BIOS version.

A dud hard drive is unlikely; you'd still get to the Power On Self Test (POST) in pretty much any drive-failure situation, I think. Some other card that's let go in a big way could perhaps cause these symptoms; I'm not sure.

If you're comfortable with opening the machine, do so and yank every card and cable until all you've got is

TECH TIPS

WETWARE

Absolutely the best excuse I've had so far for getting to work late: "The seal on the water pump on one of my PCs failed."

LETTER OF THE MONTH

ORBITAL INTERNET

Q> I've heard a lot about these new satellite connections and about the 400Kbps connection speed - how do they work? Also, I was wondering how they achieve these speeds when the maximum setting for communication between a PC and a modem is 115,200Bps?

Benjamin Corthorne, Avondale, Qld

A> From a user's point of view, the kind of satellite Internet access that you can presently get in Australia (see <http://www.ihug.com.au/satnet/> and <http://www.bigpond.com/Advance/>; the second site covers the Telstra cable and satellite broadband options) is simple enough. You set up a 65 centimetre dish, and a modem; the data from you to the ISP goes via the lousy 31.6 kilobit per second modem link, and the data from the Internet to you comes via the fat 400 kilobit per second satellite pipe. All you need is line of sight to the geostationary satellite, which more orbitally savvy readers will realise has to be above the northern horizon for us Aussies, from wherever you mount the dish. So what's good about satellite broadband? Well, it'll work anywhere in Australia with somewhere to mount the dish. And the download speed is great. And it's not very expensive, either - not all that much more than an all-you-can-eat dial-up account. What's bad about it? Well, upload speeds are no better than any other dial-up system. This isn't important for most users, though, as regular Internet use is almost all downstream data. And

you still need a modem as well as the satellite gear, and tie up a phone line while you're using it. And, very importantly, its latency is appalling. In l33t-game-dood-speak, "UR PING W1LL SUK & Joo W1LL G3T oWN3D" if you play any realtime action games.

Ihug, the company that runs Satnet, claims that it adds only 100mS to normal dial-up latency. Which is bad enough. User reports, though, uniformly agree that there's just no point even trying. Turn-based games, no problem. Maybe even very tolerant realtime strategy games, if you don't mind weird stuff happening when things get hectic. But FORGET action games.

By the way, whenever people start talking about fast communication links, by the way, they start getting confused about bits and bytes, because there's no agreement on which abbreviation to use for which unit. So this might be a good moment for me to have a little whinge about the subject.

Yes, I think I will.

Whether you like it or not.

Is this your column? No. So pay attention, class.

I hope you brought enough of those for everyone, Biggs.

Correctly, the abbreviation for bit is B, and for byte is b. Yes, the bit is smaller, but it came first - old computers had no definite "word length", and it was quite a while before the eight bit byte became the standard.

Thus, megabyte should be abbreviated Mb, and megabit should be abbreviated MB; megabits



LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS THE MOST EXCELLENT SIDEWINDER AND DUAL STRIKE CONTROL PADS FROM MICROSOFT'S PREMIERE RANGE OF GAME CONTROLLERS. CHEERS MICROSOFT!

per second, the commonest way of expressing the speed of a communications link of some kind, is MB/s.

People get this wrong so often, though, that there might as well be no correct meaning. It's quite common for one person to divide a megabits-per-second speed by eight to get the megabytes-per-second speed, which is more readily comprehensible to the average punter, but then still use the "MB/S" abbreviation; since he's still talking about a communications link, many listeners may assume he's still talking megabits. It's all hideously confusing. Enjoy.

Oh - you wanted to know how broadband connections run so fast? By connecting via a network card, not a serial port, that's how.

the CPU, RAM and video card, and see if you get startup. If you do, then plug drives and cards back in until you find the problem. If you don't get so much as a beep out of the board even then, the only way to see where the problem is by swapping components back and forth with a known-working computer. If you can get hold of a spare power supply, though, try that first. Defective PSUs can cause all kinds of bizarre behaviour.

1400HZ! BANG! DARN!

Q> I was reading a letter from PCPP#48 about Refresh Rates, and tried to change my refresh rate. When I did I got a warning message saying that some monitors would be damaged by improper refresh rates. I have an IBM 2235 C50 monitor and a 3dfx Voodoo 3 2000 PCI video card in my PII-400 computer. I'm not adventurous about changing computer settings I have no idea about. So, if I changed the refresh rate to 85Hz would it damage my monitor like the warning says it

could, or am I just wasting time in which my Voodoo card could be running heaps better?

Matthew, Email

A> While it is, indeed, possible to damage some monitors by sending them a signal they can't sync to, it's not at all likely. Most monitors these days just give you a black screen when they're sent an out-of-range signal, and older monitors that try and fail to sync to a given signal usually just give a scrambled display until you send them something more sensible. That said, you're not likely to even be able to SELECT an out-of-range setting for your monitor, if Windows knows what kind of monitor it is. The huge list of monitor "drivers" you can see if you go to Display Properties -> Settings -> Advanced -> Monitor -> Change -> Next -> Display a list... -> Next -> Show all hardware is really just a list of resolution and refresh rate settings that Windows thinks each given monitor can support. It's commonly a bit too conservative, not letting you pick the highest refresh

rates a given monitor can really support, but if you've got the right monitor selected, you're very unlikely to be able to pick a too-high setting.

CONNECTOR CONFUSION

Q> I have recently bought a MSI GeForce 256 8809 video card. In the feature list, it says "HDTV/Digital Flat Panel Supported". Does this mean it's capable of TV (or VCR, the manual said it supports PAL and NTSC which I know to be TV formats) viewing/support, or will I have to buy a decoder card separately?

The GeForce also came with Cyberlink's PowerDVD. If it does somehow support TV IN/OUT, how would I connect it? The cable that came with my card has four pins surrounded by a metal cylinder.

Damian, Email

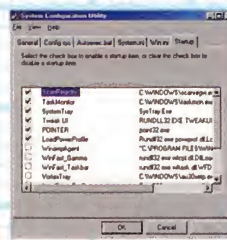
A> That little round connector you're looking at is called a "Y/C", or occasionally "S-VHS", connector. It's the best analogue video connector you're going to find on consumer gear; it keeps the

TECH TIPS

AUTO-MAXIMISE

Irked by Internet Explorer's utter inability to open "child" windows maximised? Get RtvReco from <http://www.clearlight.com/~rtvsoft/>. It can do various things to new windows based on their titles, and one of the things it can do is maximise the blighters automatically.

Are you troubled by unsightly excess system tray icons in Windows 98? Can't figure out what the heck's loading that darn useless Task Scheduler every time you start Windows? Help is at hand. Run the System Configuration Utility, either by going to Start -> Accessories -> System Tools -> System Information and picking it from the Tools menu, or the quick way by going to Start -> Run... and typing "msconfig". This handy-dandy program lets you selectively disable any item or items in config.sys, autoexec.bat, system.ini, win.ini and the tricky bits of the registry that have to do with Windows startup. And it destroys nothing - if something you need stops working, you can just re-check a box you've unchecked, and that item will be activated again when you reboot!



A close-up photograph of a PCI expansion card. The card is populated with several components: a large blue integrated circuit (likely a graphics or network chip), a smaller black chip, and various passive components like capacitors and resistors. On the left edge, there are several connectors: a blue 15-pin D-sub connector, a smaller black connector, and a large black circular connector. On the right edge, there is a BNC connector and a D-sub connector. The card is mounted on a green printed circuit board (PCB).

with special flat panel output connectors on them. They work with similarly equipped flat screens to deliver digital image data straight to the display. This avoids the redundant convert-to-analogue routine; LCD flat screens, unlike ordinary cathode ray tube screens, don't actually need an analogue signal, though most of them accept it and re-digitise it internally. But your MSI card has no such connector, right?

And you don't have three thousand dollars to drop on a flat screen anyway, do you?

So don't get too excited.

Q> I received a 2.5Gb hard drive for Christmas last year. Unfortunately it was a second hand one and has a 1.5Gb Windows NT partition I cannot get rid of. I tried using FDISK but it will not recognise the NT partition. I really need the extra space. Is there any utility out there that can kill NT partitions from Windows 98? I seem to remember a mention of a utility for viewing NTFS partitions from FAT partitions in an earlier PC PowerPlay.

which can't be bigger than 2Gb, waste tons of space, and generally suck like a five foot hole in the wall of the International Space Station. For flexible partition creation and deletion and resizing under Windows, you need commercial software. PowerQuest's Partition Magic (<http://www.powerquest.com/partitionmagic/index.html>) is the most popular such package. Unless you're drive-fiddling a LOT, though, you can live without it.

**TWO PACK MARANELLO
RED, FLUFFY DICE,
AND NEON...**

Q> I'm sitting here looking at my PC case and I was wondering if I could give a facelift. A nice paint job. Getting rid of this crappy beige colour for something groovier. But the main problem is I wouldn't have a clue where to start, what types of paints I could use and even if it's safe for my PC. I can take all the panels off the case and pretty much get it down to it's skin and bones, though.

Pete Sanderson, Email

A> Very many computer hot-rodgers have trodden this path, Grasshopper. It's easy enough to get the panels off (even if they're riveted - you can always drill out pop rivets...), go over 'em with a power drill and wire brush, then paint 'em with anything that'll stick to metal. You can use automotive paints and make it really gorgeous - it's probably not too hard to get a car respray place to do your PC for not many dollars. But the plastic front bezel is more of a problem. You can get paints that stick OK to plastic from model shops (it's expensive, but you don't need much) or, no doubt, proper paint suppliers. But your PC will look dorky if your CD-ROM and floppy drive front panels are still beige, so you've got to do them too. Which can be fiddly. If you're going to have a stab at it, I'd recommend you go to a computer shop and buy a new case - something nice and solid - and muck around with THAT while your PC's still working in the old case. Then you can transplant it when the job's done, and you don't lose the PC for days on end as you wait for paint to dry or the hot-rod shop to finish putting those purple flames down the side :-).

TOTAL WAR

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CD POWERPLAY #52

Starting CD PowerPlay

Welcome to the latest edition of CD PowerPlay. This month's three discs include some of the hottest demos from around the world. Highlight of this month's selection is Deus Ex - with its main character, JC Denton, firstperson gaming has a new action hero to worship. Elsewhere, there's a bunch of quality games to choose from - Dark Reign 2, Motocross Madness 2 and Messiah to name but three.

As always, navigation through the online menus is easy. Simply click on the category you want and then select the game or utility. We hope you enjoy this month's CD and hope to see you back next month for another dose of gaming goodness.

cdtech@powerplay.next.com.au

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DISC 1



Deus Ex

Category: RPG

Developer: Eidos Interactive

Need: P2-300, 64MB, SVGA, 3D Card

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: N/A

■ The future is here, and the world is a dangerous and chaotic place. Terrorists operate openly, killing thousands; drug, disease, and pollution kill even more. The world's economies are close to collapse and the gap between the insanely wealthy and the desperately poor has grown to the size of the Grand Canyon. Worst of all, an ages old conspiracy bent on world domination has decided that the time is right to emerge from the shadows and take control. No one believes they exist. No one but you.

CONTROLS

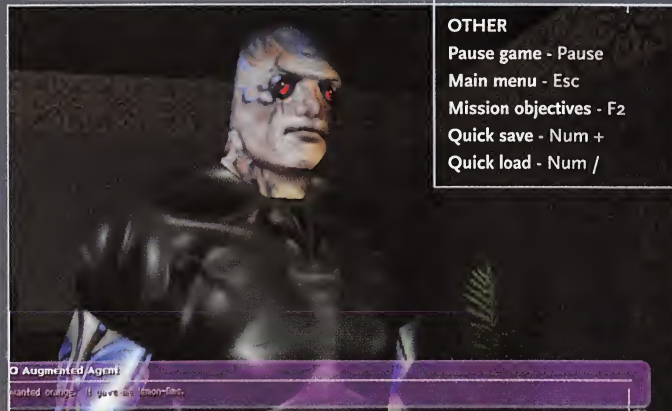
Moving
Forward - Up, W
Backward - Down, S
Sidestep left - Left, A
Sidestep right - Right, D
Lean left - Q
Lean right - E
Jump - Spacebar, Ins
Crouch - X, Num .
Walk/Run - Shift (hold),
Caps Lock (toggle)

ACTIONS

Use object in hand - Left mouse button
Use object in world - Right mouse button
Drop/Throw object - Tab
Put object away - Backspace
Quick select item - o-g
Inventory - F1
Reload weapon - ;
Change ammo - '
Toggle scope - [
Toggle laser sight -]

OTHER

Pause game - Pause
Main menu - Esc
Mission objectives - F2
Quick save - Num +
Quick load - Num /





Enemy Engaged: Comanche vs Hokum

Category: Flight Sim

Developer: Empire Interactive

Need: P2-233, 32MB, SVGA

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX

■ The RAH-66 Comanche and the KA-52 Hokum are two of the most advanced helicopters in the world, and now you have a chance to fly them.

Sequel to Razorworks' Enemy Engaged: Apache vs. Havoc, this new title has everything the first

one had, except much improved. The detail on the ground objects is stunning - watch as the gatling gun on an M1A2 Abrams pivots to fire on a Hokum or watch as a ground battle unfolds between enemy units. And with the ever-changing dynamic campaign, you'll never get bored of flying.

Flying Heroes

Category: Fantasy

Developer: Talonsoft

Need: P2-266, 64MB, SVGA, 3D Card

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX, Modem

■ Flying Heroes is a realtime firstperson aerial combat game that merges technology and classic high fantasy in an airborne gladiatorial fight



for survival. In the ceremonial battles for national supremacy you can fight elite airborne warriors high above the fantastic lands of Hesperia. Piloting a stunning array of flying craft including giant, majestic birds, huge reptiles with incredible wingspans, magic carpets and teapots, and enormous balloon-based machines made of wood and steel, each one packing an arsenal of impressive power. It is a challenge that only the bravest pilots undertake.

Serious Sam

Category: Action

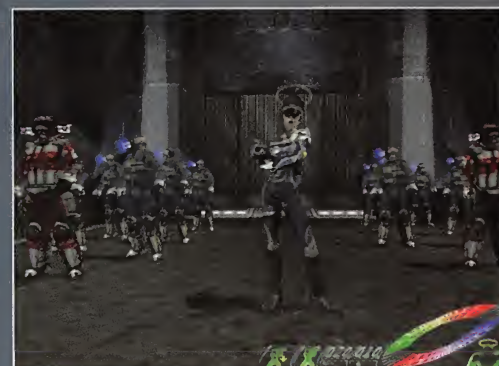
Developer: Croteam

Need: P3-450, 64MB, SVGA, 3D Card

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: IPX, TCP/IP, Modem

■ In the near future, during the first interstellar travels, humans encounter great evil roaming the galaxy for last few eons. The evil being is an incarnation of the last of the ancient immortals named Tah-Um (or in English - Notorious Mental). Mental has set forth to wipe the earthlings out for sheer fun, just like it did with all the other civilisations in the galactic history. This time, humans have a secret weapon left to them by an extinct civilisation from Sirius - Timelock. Timelock will enable special forces veteran Sam 'Serious' Stone to return to the time of ancient Egypt and assassin Mental while it is offhand.



Messiah

Category: Action/Adventure

Developer: Interplay

Need: P233, 64MB, SVGA, 3D Card

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: N/A

■ Bob is an angel ordered by God to go and clean up the disgusting, sleazy, and infested world of the future. He has been given the power of possession so that he can sneak up on any living creature and leap right into their soul! With your help, Bob can then use their bodies and weapons to cripple, impale, and incinerate the cities of sinners sent to stop you from finding Satan himself. Hiding in their souls, Bob can use these sinners bodies against their will, as a shield or even pretend to be just another twisted citizen in the Messiah world. The rules are up to you...

CONTROLS

Turn Left - Arrow Left
Turn Right - Arrow Right
Move Forward - Arrow Up
Move Backward - Arrow Down
Strafe Left - Z
Strafe Right - X
Walk Toggle - Shift
Jump/Flap Wings - Ctrl
Action - Enter
Enter Combat
Mode/Shoot - Space
Grenade - C

Depossess Character -

Backspace
Crouch - D
Sniper Mode Zoom In - Num Pad + or Mouse Wheel Up
Sniper Mode Zoom Out - Num Pad - or Mouse Wheel Down
Sniper Mode Quick Exit - Num Pad *
Freelook - A
Mission Objectives - F5
Menu - Esc



Motocross Madness 2

Category: Racing Sim

Developer: Microsoft

Need: P2-300, 32MB, SVGA, 3D Card

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX

■ Motocross Madness 2 is the sequel to the award-winning Motocross Madness. The game features all of the dirt bike action of the original but takes a quantum leap forward with entirely new gameplay depth, graphics realism, accessibility, and community/multiplayer features. It features an upgraded physics engine that allows independent rider and biker motion, variable surface friction (slick ice, gravel, mud), and a range of bike handling and performance options.

CONTROLS

Steering - L and R ARROW keys
Gas - UP ARROW key
Brakes - DOWN ARROW key
Leaning forward - W key
Leaning back - S key
Reverse - BACKSPACE key

MOUSE CONTROLS

Steering - Slide mouse left and right
Gas - Mouse Button 1
Brakes - Mouse Button 2
Leaning forward and back - Slide mouse forward and back
Reverse - BACKSPACE key

Shattered Galaxy

Category: Realtime Strategy

Developer: Nexon

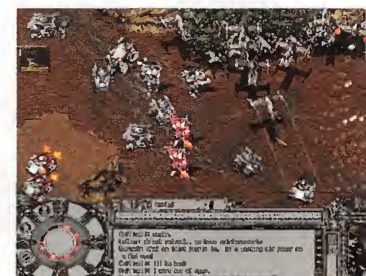
Need: P200, 64MB, SVGA

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: IPX, TCP/IP

■ Shattered Galaxy offers players the chance to become masters of war and politics, dominating their peers in realtime strategy combat. As a human warlord stranded in a hostile alien environment, where danger is commonplace and survival is paramount, it is your job to boost your hero's political rank,

resources, and skills through battle to allow him to construct a force of military units which, at the end of the day, can walk away from battle victorious. Shattered Galaxy allows for realtime tactical combat that can involve as many as 18 players in a single battle.



DISC 2 TOP 100 SPECIAL



Dungeon Keeper 2

Dungeon Keeper 2

Category: Realtime Strategy
Developer: Electronic Arts
Need: P166, 32MB, SVGA 2MB
3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: N/A

Dungeon Keeper 2 is a genre-defying blend of realtime strategy, god sim, firstperson action and fantasy roleplaying. DK2 turns the traditional tables by placing you in the role of sinister archfiend and master of the cavernous Underworld. Build a dungeon to your own design, lay traps and doors to protect yourself, recruit an army of foul creatures and lure the heroic adventurers to their doom in your quest to reach the surface world of humankind.

Freespace 2

Category: Space Combat
Developer: Interplay
Need: P200, 32MB, SVGA
3D: Direct 3D, Glide
Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX

FreeSpace 2 continues in the year 2367, 32 years after the Great War, where the imposing forces of the

Shivans have surfaced again, threatening the survival of the Terrans and the Vasudans. In this post-war era, rebellion and civil war jeopardize the security of the colonies and the future of both the Terrans and Vasudans. While the rebellion rages on in the remote areas of Terran space, players serve as part of the Galactic Terran Vasudan Alliance (GTVA), monitoring and intervening in the interstellar skirmish.

Grand Theft Auto 2

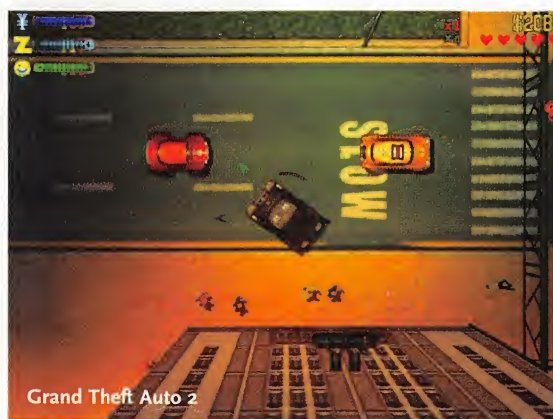
Category: Action/Adventure
Developer: Take 2 Interactive

Need: P200, 32MB, SVGA, 3D Card

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: N/A

GTA2 is the follow-up to one of the most controversial titles ever - the critically acclaimed, best-selling Grand Theft Auto. Set in an eerily familiar, yet futuristic, dark and vast metropolis, you play the role of a lone gunman who is out of cash, out of luck and



Grand Theft Auto 2

definitely operates outside the law. Law and order is breaking down. The city has been carved up by ruthless gangs and crime syndicates leaving the police and government to fight an even tougher war to wash scum like you from the city streets. However, the city is yours for the taking if you have the guts and the brains.

Half-Life: Opposing Force

Category: Firstperson Shooter

Developer: Sierra

Need: P133, 32MB, SVGA, 3D Card

3D: Direct 3D, Open GL

Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX
Half-Life blends action, drama, and adventure with stunning technology to create a frighteningly realistic world where players need to think smart to survive. As a soldier sent to eliminate Gordon Freeman, you are separated from your base unit. Amidst the chaos, you discover a highly advanced alien life forms have come to Earth to pillage the planet. Now you face battling fierce new alien creatures and a variety of other foes in an effort to save your life.



Half-Life: Opposing Force

Homeworld

Category: Realtime Strategy

Developer: Sierra

Need: P200, 32MB, SVGA
3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX
Homeworld's epic tale begins in the far reaches of the universe. Long ago, your ancestors were banished across the galaxy. Forced into exile by an evil race who conquered the universe, you race has never seen its place of origin. Lost in the mists of time, few even remember what brought them into exile. Now, however, a discovery has been made: the exact location of your Homeworld is now known. You head up a colonization fleet to travel across the vast reaches of space to finally go home. But don't think the journey will be easy.

Age Of Empires 2

Category: Realtime Strategy

Developer: Microsoft

Need: P166, 32MB, SVGA
3D: N/A

Multiplayer: TCP/IP
Age Of Empires II (AOE 2) is the sequel to the award-winning, strategy game Age of Empires. This sequel spans a thousand years, from the fall of Rome through the Middle Ages. In it, players lead one of 13 civilisations into greatness. This trial version lets you take part in the William Wallace Learning Campaign, in which players take command of the highlanders and learn the basic concepts of the game, such as how to build an economy, how to train their soldiers, and how to fight and defeat their enemy. Good luck!



Freespace 2



Starlancer

Category: Space Combat

Developer: Microsoft

Need: P200, 32MB, SVGA, 3D Card

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX

■ StarLancer, the latest from DigitalAnvil, combines the intense action of first-person space combat with the drama and intrigue of a classic WWII air combat movie. Countries from around the world including the United States, China, Russia and Great Britain have formed strategic alliances and now battle for control of Earth, Mars and other planets across the solar system. You will be part of a newly formed, ragtag aviation unit, the 45th Volunteers Squadron. If you choose to accept the challenge you must prove yourself and earn the respect of your peers.



foes surround you, testing the gut reaction that brought you here in the first place. Your purpose is unknown. Your only company, a mantra: fight or be finished. Welcome to the Arena.

Thief Gold

Category: Action/Adventure

Developer: Eidos Interactive

Need: P200, 32MB, SVGA

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: TCP/IP

Thief is a revolutionary firstperson action adventure that introduces stealth, subterfuge, and mystery to a tired genre of mindless shooting. As Garrett, a cynical and world-weary master thief, you must make use of stealth and intellect to complete your missions. You live in an ancient city of a fictional past where magic and primitive technology coexist

uneasily. Your victims are the city's corrupt and privileged nobility, whose wealth is at your disposal as long as their guards don't see you, at least not until it is too late.

Unreal Tournament

Category: Firstperson Shooter

Developer: GT Interactive

Need: P200, 32MB, 3D Card

3D: Direct 3D, Glide

Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX
Unreal Tournament's got it all: a ton of amazing levels, kick-ass new weapons, brain-melting new modes of play (Capture the Flag, Assault Match, Domination Match, Last Man Standing, and of course - Deathmatch!), unbelievably deadly Bots (computer controlled opponents or team mates), and a slew of

other features bound to have your happiness glands working overtime!

Worms Armageddon

Category: Turn-based Strategy

Developer: Team 17

Need: P100, 16MB, Win95/98

3D: N/A

Multiplayer: TCP/IP, modem, serial
Worms is a turnbased strategy game where up to eight players can participate in any given match. You command a platoon of Worms who must destroy the other opposing worms with an assortment of devastating weapons. Each platoon of Worms is given an assortment of weapons, tools and utilities in which to dispose of the enemy in anyway they deem necessary. Full contact, no protection... no worries.



Quake III Arena

Category: Firstperson Shooter

Developer: Activision

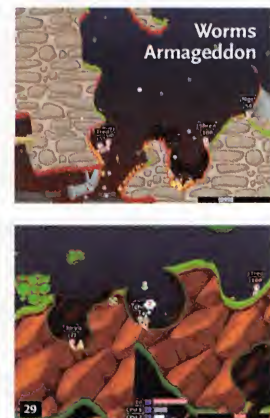
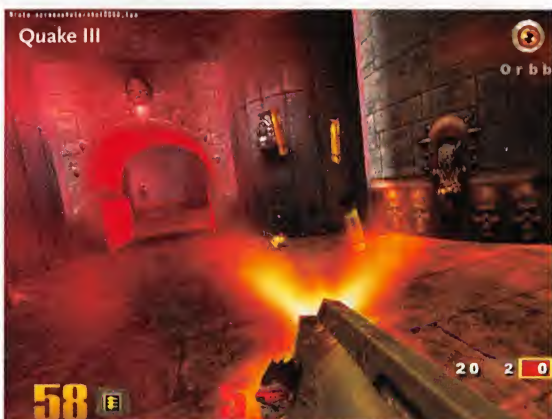
Need: P90, 32MB, 3D Card

3D: 3DFX, OpenGL

Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX

The eyes of the alien Xaero are narrowing. Immassively watching and

waiting as the Arena transforms high-ranking warriors into spineless mush. But the stench of death isn't enough to cloud your judgement. Abandoning every ounce of common sense, you lunge onto a stage of narrowing landscapes and veiled abysses. Leigons of



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DISC 3



Dark Reign 2

Category: Realtime Strategy

Developer: Activision

Need: P2-233, 64MB, SVGA, 3D Card

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: Internet Only

In Dark Reign 2's apocalyptic future, an ecologically unstable Earth has fallen under the rule of a repressive world police force, the Jovian Detention Authority. Charged by Earth's elite with protecting their exclusive 'dome' cities, the JDA is locked in an ongoing battle to pacify the masses of urban 'Sprawlers' who dwell in the toxic, irradiated world outside. It is not until the occurrence of a single, catastrophic event, however, that the Sprawlers unite their unconventional technologies and weaponry to engage the JDA in the violent drama of Earth's final chapter. The battle unfolds on land, sea and air, and gamers can take up the cause of either side, fighting through 20 challenging day and night missions. The Dark Reign 2 Online Test is playable only on WON.

Terminus

Category: Space Combat

Developer: Vicarious Visions

Need: P2-300, 64MB, SVGA, 3D Card

3D: Direct3D, Glide

Multiplayer: N/A

Terminus takes place across our Solar System 200 years in the future. Space colonization has just begun and both Earth and Mars enjoy unprecedented prosperity. Then, it happens! Ancient alien technology is discovered which allows instantaneous travel among far-flung destinations, and the course of human history is changed forever. Players fly, trade, shoot, or steal their way through a single or multiplayer campaign bumping into hundreds of independently-acting characters and ships controlled by Artificial Intelligence (AI), and interact with 18 fully-equipped and schematically accurate space stations. The demo contains a series of training missions that

teaches gamers the basics of Newtonian aviation, a one-person gauntlet that hurls wave upon wave of enemy ships at the pilot, and one solo mission from the game's campaign. People will be able to choose to complete the mission from either the Earth or Mars side. Upon successful completion of the mission, a special trailer will run that includes snippets from the game as a teaser to the larger plot.

Hunt for the Red Baron

Category: Flight Sim

Developer: Fiendish Games

Need: P2-233, 32MB, SVGA, 3D Card

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX

Get behind the controls of a World War I fighter plane and take to the skies in Fiendish Games' dogfighting extravaganza, Hunt for the Red Baron. Travel to the green fields of France, the hot sands of Africa, and the desolate setting of a war-torn Belgium

as you take part in 25 unique, action-packed missions. Use your machine guns, rockets, and bombs to eliminate enemy fighters and take out key ground targets. Fly four different fighter planes, each with their own feel and handling based on the actual planes themselves.

F1 World Grand Prix 99

Category: Driving Sim

Developer: Eidos Interactive

Need: P166, 32MB, SVGA, 3D Card

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: N/A

Based on the 1999 World Championship, F1 World Grand Prix places you in the driving seat and gives you first hand experience of every aspect of this challenging competition. Featuring real teams and drivers, each car is a faithful replica of the real car used in 1999, both visually and in terms of its handling. In fact, should you

drive well, your lap times for the different circuits should be similar to those logged during the real 1999 season.

EuroLeague Football

Category: Soccer Sim

Developer: Dinamic

Need: P200, 16MB, SVGA

3D: N/A

Multiplayer: N/A

For many people, football isn't a matter of life and death - it's far more important than that. EuroLeague Football lets you control a European football (or soccer, depending on where you're positioned on Earth) team as they attempt to take home as many trophies (all football-related, hopefully) as humanly possible. Instead of controlling the players, you use your managerial expertise to recruit, train and position your team members into winning form. Sounds dull? Boy are you wrong. This is a hellishly addictive genre and

it's quite possible you will lose your sanity after playing for weeks on end without sleep. Don't say we didn't warn you.

Star Trek: ConQuest Online

Category: Online Strategy

Developer: Activision

Need: P90, 8MB, SVGA

3D: N/A

Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX

Star Trek: ConQuest Online is a turn-based strategy game that challenges players to outwit another opponent in an interstellar game of cat and mouse. Star Trek: ConQuest Online is to be the base for an online world that will ultimately include pieces from the entire Star Trek universe. Star Trek: ConQuest Online is the first online-only game set in the Star Trek universe. The game will deliver the characters, ships and weapons from the Star Trek: The Next Generation world to the PC in a strategic race to rule the galaxy.

UTILITIES

Bulletproof

With Bullet Proof FTP, interrupted file transfers are easy to resume. Should you encounter a disconnection when downloading files, Bullet Proof FTP will automatically reconnect and resume downloading. Features include automatic disconnection after downloading files, a queue that supports drag and drop, and a tray icon that displays the progress of file transfers.

ICQ 2000

ICQ 2000 is the latest release of ICQ ("I seek you"), the popular instant messaging program that lets you communicate with friends and colleagues in real time. This major update lets you get a glimpse of where the popular instant messenger is heading, such as being more firewall-friendly, containing enhanced privacy features, a few cool tweaks and an easier interface.

Winzip 8

WinZip is a straightforward, fast, and easy-to-use zipping and unzipping utility that includes built-in support for popular Internet file formats such as TAR, ZIP, UUencode, XXencode, BinHex, MIME, and Unix-compressed files. Older ARC, ARJ, and LZH files are supported via external programs. This latest release comes with

many great features including the ability to create archives that span multiple floppies (in case you need to zip a huge file), builds self-extracting archives so that recipients without a zipper can decompress the files, as well as offering optional password-protection for archives.

Winboost 2000

WinBoost 2000 is a special utility to configure and personalize Windows 98/98SE/95 looks and feels. Using easy to use graphical user interface you can configure hundreds of Windows 98/95 hidden settings, from the Start Menu, Desktop, Accessories, Windows Explorer, to Internet Explorer. This is something that you cannot do on the regular operations. In addition, you will get hundreds of selected Windows 98/95 Tips & Tricks to boost your Windows performance.

mIRC 5.7

mIRC is a configurable IRC client that has an intuitive user interface, an events handler, and full send and receive capabilities for DCC (direct client connection) files. It also has color text, aliases, remote commands, backgrounds option, and sound. It automatically opens Web sites as they are mentioned in a conversation, ignore DCC Sends that match specified filenames or

types, and lock the program to disable various features.

PS2 Rate

PS2Rate allows you to take greater control over your mouse. This simple 112k download can configure the PS/2 mouse sampling rate on Windows. If you occasionally feel like exterminating your mouse because of its low response time, stop, because it could actually be your operating system. You could either go into your control panel settings to fool around with mouse movements or cut to the chase by using this program to simply arrange the amount of hertz. In just a couple of seconds you can boost the level of output and turn your mouse into a smooth operator.

Roger Wilco - Mark 1a

This first, official, nonbeta, nontest release of Roger Wilco presents a small, standalone application that allows you and your friends to talk to each other while playing multiplayer games online. It works with most existing games, such as Half-Life, Quake II, Diablo, Tribes, Unreal, and StarCraft, and will also work with other games that have multiplayer capabilities still in development. In addition to games, Roger Wilco will work with ICQ so that you can chat verbally with your nongamer friends.



IN-BOX

Letters Page Tip: The violence in videogames debate is over. Please, people, it's time to move on...

WRITE TO: PC PowerPlay Letters, Level 6, 418A Elizabeth St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010. letters@pcpowerplay.next.com.au

LOOKING GLASS LAMENT

The demise of Looking Glass Studios in late May prompted an overwhelming response to the PCPP Inbox. This is but a small selection of the commemorations and condolences we received. Pass the tissues, please...

I just want to say thanks to Looking Glass for their innovation and painstaking attention to detail in their games, as well as working hard to include a thing called a storyline that most game designers seem to forget. Hopefully games such as Deus Ex will achieve the same level of immersion and enjoyment as System Shock 2 did and game designers will continue the trend that Looking Glass has set. All I'm really saying is that it sucks in a big way.

Adam Pickup

I don't believe it. When I looked at the words on my screen "Looking Glass is closing their doors", I lamented the end of one of the best developers in the gaming world today. System Shock 1 and 2 are two of the greatest games I have ever played. If a quality company like Looking Glass can't stay on the market then who can? I think this shows how the market is changing (has already changed) to a "big company" formula, with EA, Microsoft, and the like dominating everyone else, and pushing or buying out the competition. The marketing power that those giants have is just too much for anyone else to handle. Let's just hope that they can stay focussed on the main issues, that being pumping out great games.

Night Raven

It has been announced that Looking Glass Studios have closed down due to financial difficulties.

I'm sure this would have come as sad news to the many fans out there who enjoyed the likes of System Shock 2 and the Thief series. System Shock 2 did it for me in ways no other

game has come close to. Sure, Half-Life was brilliant (and I still love it 'til this day), but SS2 totally blew my mind away. The depth and detail of this game was phenomenal, the atmosphere it created truly depicted what sci-fiction horror in games is really about. This game totally immersed me from beginning to end. The game had atmosphere: it instilled fear into the player. SS2 had you frantically scrambling from room to room, searching desperately for the few ammo clips or med or psi hypos scattered around. You have to be so totally focused on what you're doing to stay alive that you sweat. This is what the Looking Glass team did for a gamer, and I haven't even started to begin with Thief. It's sad to see them go, and I just wonder whether another software company can come along and be as innovative as the LG team. The Thief and SS titles are true classics, so for everyone out there who has never picked up System Shock 2, buy a copy and experience something truly phenomenal in gaming.

Sam Tram

A tragedy has recently occurred that will affect the entire gaming community for some time to come: Looking Glass Studios has been shutdown.

These talented developers have brought us such Wonders of Gaming like Thief, System Shock 2, Ultima Underworld and most recently, Thief 2. Although I never played Ultima Underworld, I am told by many that it was the best of the Ultima series. I can comment on the masterpieces Thief, Thief 2 and SS2. These games did things never attempted before. They had such gripping, involving storylines, such intense gameplay and they had character that other games lacked.

It is extremely sad to know that the gaming industry has lost such a brilliant team of creators. I urge others out in the gaming world to go and buy Thief and other Looking Glass

games, and play them often as a tribute to those talented folk.

Mr Garrett

Today I read the news that Looking Glass Studios has closed. The official website (www.lglass.com) mentioned that they had no choice but to close doors due to the fact no one was willing to support them anymore, and that they have run out of 'cash'. It was profoundly disturbing and sad that such classics as System Shock and Thief didn't help their cause.

Escalation of game development budgets has all but made the 'Two Men Games Company in Their Garage' a teenage fantasy, long forgotten in the oceans of time. As increasingly Hollywood-like games industry desperately relies on hype and recycled formulas to sell their products, even the incredibly large amount of games coming out each month feeds us so little, and barely holds little more surprise than walking into a McDonalds.

As a buyer of many Looking Glass games, I'm greatly disappointed to realise now that I won't be seeing System Shock 3. How many games do you really remember the names of supporting characters in a game? I will gladly trade all my Quake hours for one minute of Dr. Janice Polito's voice email. In many years to come I will remember the time when I armed myself an assault rifle in my trembling hands and survived an epic struggle in the very heart of the Many. After I destroyed the Many, the voices of the Many whispered in my ears, 'Beware of the machine mother. She is a stranger to everything that we cherish.' Maybe the users who prefer 'Tomb Raider 9: Look at My Swaying Hips' over System Shock must have grown a stranger to everything that reminds us why we started to play computer games in the first place.

Earnest Kim

Unchangeable feature

I believe that people who pirate games by downloading them from the web are missing out. They are missing out on:

1. In-game music
2. Being able to upgrade through patches
3. Playing the game on the internet

Byte Size

I like Daikatana. It's not as bad as what people made out. Bit hard, though.

Unitedfive

There's always one, isn't there?

4. Movie sequences and cutscenes
5. There may be an unchangeable feature such as resolution
6. A good decent day or couple of nights worth of gaming!
7. Mods

These people are not experiencing the game for what it is.

Peter Marshall

And that was a Community Service Announcement.

Enemies are robots

Has anyone actually thought about the evil nasties of the game world? If you think about it, some aren't actually evil. Dungeon Keeper, for example,

Byte Size

Shodan moves to Canberra? That explains why all my friends ISPs have been acting up lately.

The Kha'Ri

Byte Size

How does one get to be a game beta tester?

This really interests me because I have sometimes got games before they came out and found all my friends liked to hear what I thought of it.

SilverHand

Hmm, I think you've got some explaining to do...



LETTER OF THE MONTH

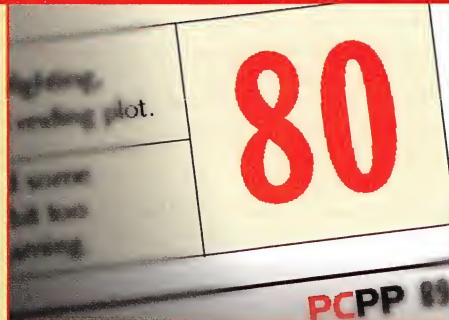
Accentuates the point

After reading reviews in your magazine, I have come to this conclusion: it seems that every game that you come across, you expect to be a life changing experience. I believe that your scores are more based on how disappointed you are with the game, rather than on the actual game's merits.

I am a devoted gamer myself and can see how when you play games, and talk about games, and have interviews with game programmers, and write about games, perhaps you may just start holding on for that one great game. You hope that one day there will be the perfect game and, in the meantime, you have just devoted yourself to giving lesser games bad scores.

I feel this runs through every magazine and every website I have read. For example, in a poll on ("a popular games website" - Ed), where they voted the Half-Life ending the worst, I saw this phrase, "It would only be fitting that there be the most disappointing finishing sequence to the greatest game of all time." This accentuates the point I have made here.

Only a few places have recognized what I have said. ("A slightly less popular games website"



- Ed), for example, held a poll for the most disappointing game of all time rather than the worst game of all time. All I can say is I hope you print this letter and that you take into consideration what I have stated here.

Jeremy Francis

How should we score a game? It's an interesting - and often painful - dilemma that we face, along with every other games magazine on the planet. As our Review System (p71) states, however, the game that gets the highest scores is "one that expands our gaming horizons". Innovation and originality are hugely important factors in driving the industry forward. When a game developer tries something new, the risks are greater; when they succeed, the praise should be greater, too.



Byte Size

Would you guys think it crazy to sit at a GeForce-equipped PC and play QBasic Gorillas for an hour?

Paul Swatosch

Especially when you could be playing Spider Solitaire instead.

people like me actually do enjoy that extra entertainment of games like EA's FIFA 2000 and NBA Live 2000. Not only do these games give you the choice of playing the sport, it also gives opportunities to manage a franchise, deal with a great selection of management options (trade, players' retirement, signing free agents, drafting rookies and so on).

2. I also play a variety of other games (Half-Life, System Shock 2, but if people adopt Simon's treatment of sports games to other categories of gaming, then very troublesome issues may occur. So my suggestion to those people is to be open minded to ALL GAMERS and enjoy.

Diafenes Testranomer

People who complain

This goes out to all those who waste three pages of my PC PowerPlay complaining and those who let them do it. I know I am contradicting myself here by complaining about people who complain, but anyway... (Snip! - Ed)

Joel Nelthorpe

Average length

A lot of people have been bantering about on the topic of what is a hardcore gamer (mostly concluding that they are it). Well, the answer is me, because I don't have to write in to magazines to say how hardcore I am, and... um... Oh, Bugger!

Okay, what we need is a standardised system for determining how gamey we are, something like an IQ test. What I reckon is you take into account

is just a regular guy trying to make it in the real estate business and needs a big break. In Descent, the enemies are robots, not evil. In most flight sims and tank sims and others of the same sort, the enemies are not evil, they are just the other team. In GTA, you're not evil, just a fella playing the get rich quick scheme.

Hellbringer

Black & White is really going to confuse you.

Possible to write

I was reading the Inbox section of one of my old PCPP mags (I think it was #44) and I saw some guy write in about Lawnbowls 2000 and said it didn't blah blah blah, etc.

But it had a reference to PCPP#45 (he said he was reading about it in that mag, I think)! How is it possible to write a letter in #44 about what's happening in #45?

Jacob Rhodes

Oh dear. Are you for real?

Byte Size

Btw, PCPP is one of the things the people want - no, need. So keep it coming! I admire you all... except you Christian Read. It's ok though, I don't know where you live... yet.

Simon Paterson

It's perhaps fortunate, then, that Christian knows where you live...

Drafting rookies

I have been longing to write to your mag for a while, yet hoping that the next issue to come out may contain those elusive articles featuring, or previewing sports games. Yet it didn't. But what was in the letters page prompted me to bring up some issues:

1. Simon Paterson in PCPP#50 wrote that sports games should be played in the real situation and not on a computer. Well some

Byte Size

There's a lot of groaning going on and the energy bars getting nearly all red and so is the hygiene bar.

B Ibberson

Good lord!





the number of years you've been playing, how much you play per week, average length of session, number of sessions, maximum session length, percentage of income expended of computer bits... (Aaargh! Snip!- Ed)

Beast

Actually got me off

I am writing to warn Hilander who wrote in PCPP#50 not to go anywhere near Asheron's Call or Everquest. EQ has been installed on my computer since about this time last year and if you add up all the time I've played on every character, it amounts to nearly a month straight. Therefore I have only lived 11 of the past 12 months elsewhere.

Anyhow, I am just writing to warn you, the people who call it "Evercrack" aren't far from the truth. My parents have gone through every stage to try and get me off it, to no prevail. I have, however, found one great cure that has actually got me off it for a few weeks: money. Not the excess, but the lack of. No money = No Everquest (\$10 a month US). But I still break out in cold sweats and wake up screaming at night... just wanting to camp the Ghoul Arch Magi once more... just once?

Let these words warn you well, my friend...
Satriano Fiorano

I'm dull-witted

This letter is in regard to the Letter of the Month in PCPP#50, "Overexposure". First, I should say that, yes, I love being a "virgin" while I play my games. However I must also disagree with this letter. The rationalisation behind this is: yes, there is far too much exposure of games today, but no, this does not make me any less surprised by the levels and monsters and suchlike. No, this is not because I'm dull-witted and memory-deprived, but rather the opposite. The answer is simply not to read, watch, or look at these game-spoiling articles. For example, however much I dislike the concept, I don't like to read the previews in our beloved PCPP, but instead wait until I have the game and then read the no doubt fabbo review.

Simon Paterson

Ah, excellent idea... Erm, hang on...?

Byte Size

What's the funniest game you have ever played?

Drunkmojo

Besides Daikatana? Probably a LucasArts adventure - you know, one of their earlier, much funnier ones.

Byte Size

Other than that it is the best mag ever created. Keep up the good work.

Luke Peart

Phew! You had us worried there for a minute.

Swinging a sword

I have an old steam-driven P-120, running Wings, a new whizzo sound card, and an old 3D videocard. Having just read the review of Asheron's Call in PCPP#50, can you please recommend me some games that my computer will handle similar to Asheron's Call. I'm after a "walk around in a big world, swinging a sword" type game. I've been playing C&C, Alpha Centauri and Diablo.

Simon Pender

You're in a quite a predicament. Assuming you can track them down, try Daggerfall, Might & Magic VI or - for something more strategic - Heroes of Might & Magic II.

Third one of it

With game series', it's always the first few that are better. By this, I don't mean the gameplay or the graphics - they can be better. But don't you get bored of Final Fantasy? There are eight of them now - that seems really "final" to me.

I used to like Need For Speed, until the third one of it. After that, I just got so sick of it. I played the demo of the latest one on PCPP's CD - the graphics haven't change at all. Also, Tomb Raider - man, how many of them are there now? They couldn't be bothered to number them any more and just named it "Last Revelation", just like the NFS: Porsche 2000.

Don't you get sick of the same game concept, same game control, and same graphics? Why can't it be like System Shock 2? There are so many different things to the first System Shock and are just so cool. I hope you can understand my frustration.

Michael, the Sad Gamer

True, without the injection of fresh ideas, a series will outstay its welcome.

Industry has shrugged

I'd just like to point out that the gaming world is a healthy, productive place to be. As a firm believer in the effects of what we read, watch, play and do, I've come to understand that modern games are a far cry from their damning labels of a few years back. Long plagued with accusations of violence, racism, sexism and heaven knows what else, the gaming sector has lived under a crowd of negative publicity and opinion - and thrived.

Its growth can be attributed only to the dedication of a sometimes suppressed minority, and I think that the benefits are finally being reaped. The games industry has shrugged off the protestations of older generations and risen to possess a high place in society. Whilst it may not be readily evident, the products of the software industry are now becoming a powerful vehicle for social and political messages.

This may sound daunting, but the good news is that the software world is such a maelstrom of different ideas, opinions, beliefs, cultural and historical values that gamers can immerse

PC POWERPLAY WANTS YOU!

We know you like reading reviews, but have you ever written one?

We know you like playing games, but have you ever designed one?

If you answered yes to either of these questions, then we want to hear from you.

Reader Reviews

As of this issue, PC PowerPlay will be running a regular Reader Review page where each month one lucky (well, witty, literate and eloquent, too - but mostly lucky) reader will have his or her opinion broadcast to the world. Do you think that Over-hyped Blockbuster Game X is really a pile of tosh? Or is Obscure Little Niche Title Y actually a slice of genius? Maybe - heaven forbid - you just want to confirm that our review was spot on? All you need to do is send a 500 word review - remembering to fill out the score box and include a URL for the Extra box - of a relatively recent release game to: reader_review@pcpowerplay.next.com.au

Reader CD

Also, as of this issue, every edition of CD PowerPlay comes complete with a selection of the best maps, levels, mods and skins, all supplied by our most talented readers. So if you've ever built a level for Unreal Tournament, designed a mission for Thief II, or planned a map for Age of Kings, send it to us so that all our readers can share in your creation. Skins for Quake 3, wallpaper for The Sims, even an entire Total Conversion for Half-Life - it doesn't matter what as long as you think it might be of interest to your fellow readers. If it's good then it'll be welcomed on our cover discs.

Files of less than 1MB can be sent to reader_cd@pcpowerplay.next.com.au, while anything larger should be zipped onto a cd or floppy disk and posted to:

Reader CD, PC PowerPlay, Level 6 418A
Elizabeth St, Surry Hills 2010

themselves not only in value entertainment, but a cultural steambath. The existence of magazines like your own, plus the thousands of devoted gamers from every demographic is a testament to the benefits of this fact, and I know that the advantages of this are yet to be fully realised by the rest of the world.

Iain Davey

We best make sure we use our power for Good rather than Evil.

Byte Size

Was Mr Dewhurst on acid when he wrote this?

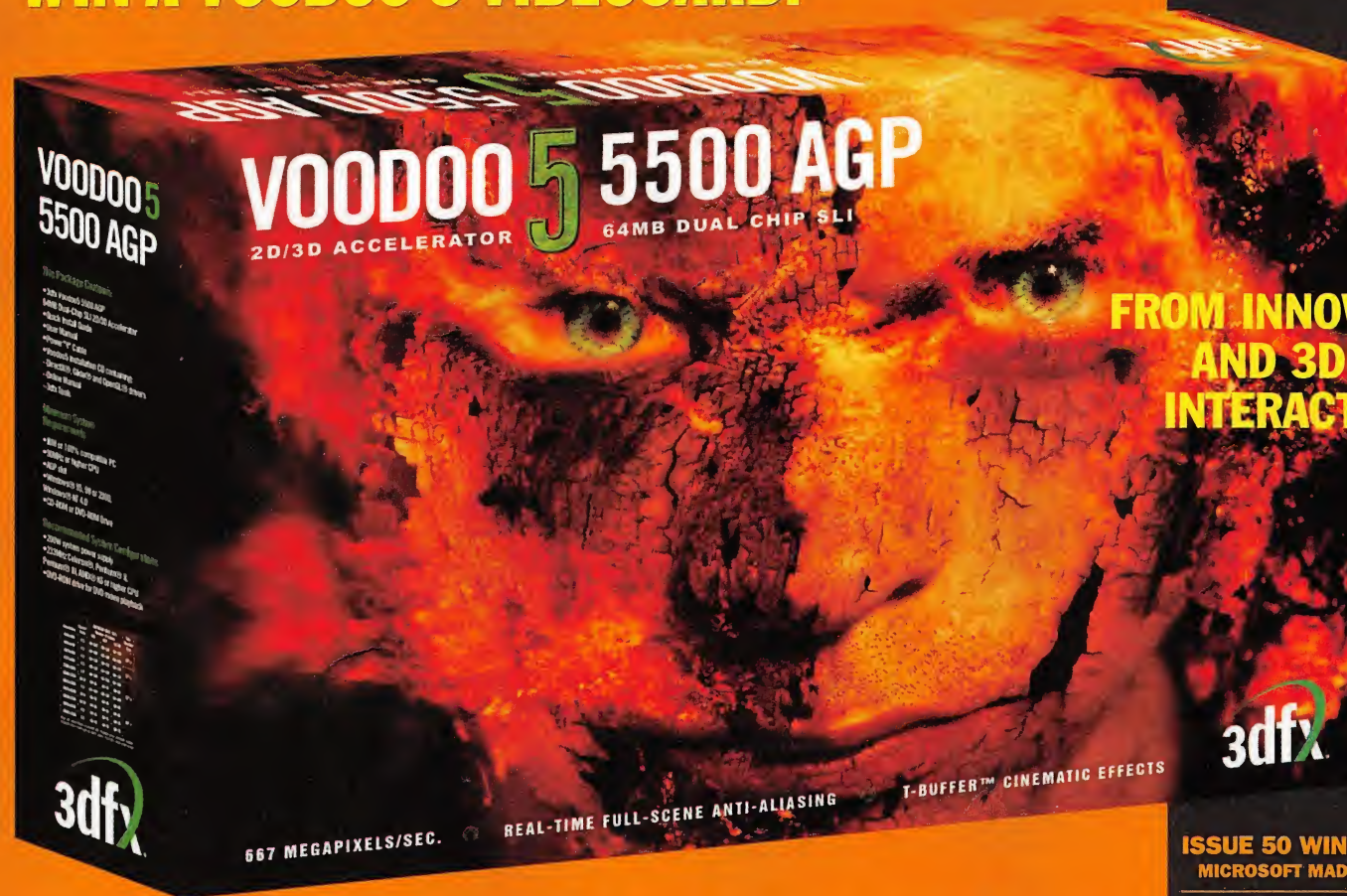
B. Carpenter

It's not outside the realm of possibility.

COMPETITIONS

VOODOO MAGIC!

WIN A VODOO 5 VIDEOCARD!



WHERE TO SEND

Write the answer, along with your name and address on the back of an envelope. TIP: Do not forget to put the competition name on the front of the envelope. All entries close August 15th. Send to:
Voodoo Comp
PC PowerPlay
78 Renwick St.
Redfern NSW, 2016

FROM INNOVISION
AND 3DFX
INTERACTIVE

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE THE ONLY PERSON IN THE COUNTRY TO WIN THE HOTTEST NEW VIDEOCARD FROM THE GRAPHICS MASTERS 3DFX?

Innovation is offering ONE incredibly lucky reader the chance to take home a Voodoo5 5500 AGP card. Boasting cool cutting-edge features such as Realtime Full Scene Anti-Aliasing, T-buffer Cinematic Effects, and FXT1 Texture Compression. The Voodoo5 is a unique dual chip solution, with two 32Mb VSA-100 processors on board, and capable of running an output of 667 megapixels per second in 32-bit colour. Which is lightning fast in anyone's book.

Put simply, the Voodoo5 rocks hard.

To win you'll need to design a game. That's right - in 100 words or less we want you to write the design document for a game. And not just any old game, but one that takes full advantage of the special graphics features offered by the Voodoo5 card. The winner will be the most creative, witty and imaginative entry we receive.

Special thanks to Innovation for making this competition possible.



ISSUE 50 WINNERS MICROSOFT MADNESS

Q. What is Chris Roberts' middle name?

A. Sadly, no one got the right answer, so we just picked six entries at random. We won't tell you the answer now, though. Instead we can save it for a Freelancer competition next year.

E. Kueh, Bateman WA
M. Boaler, Cheltenham VIC
P. Bedi, Strathfield NSW
D. Barton, Collingwood Park QLD
J. Leong, Balaclava VIC
E. Roberts, Chippendale NSW

BEST OF SPORTS

WCW Nitro was the game that was pictured.
R. Courtenay, The Gap QLD, wins a copy of FIFA 2000.

DVD



The Blair Witch Project

M15+, DENDY FILMS

One of the most hyped up movies of last year, Blair Witch either frightened or bored the pants off millions of eager viewers - being a film about the lost footage of 3 student film makers that vanish in the woods. The DVD version offers more background on the mythology and curse of the Blair Witch.

End Of Days

M15+, VILLAGE ROADSHOW

Big Arnie's back at it again, this time to save the world from the wrath of hell. The Devil, Gabriel Byrne, wants to sow his evil oats and bring forth a child of darkness to signal Armageddon. Sounds promising, but bad direction, acting and plot explain why it bombed at the box office. Includes the making of the film's only saving grace - spectacular special effects.

Three Kings

M15+, VILLAGE ROADSHOW

Possibly the most disturbing, interesting and hysterical war film ever made. 4 guys go in search of stolen gold after finding a map in a guy's ass. Includes worthwhile extras like interviews, set tours and deleted scenes.

A Chat With Bruce

CHANNEL 7'S OLYMPICS MAN TALKS ABOUT THE SYDNEY 2000 GAME

PCPP: How did you become involved in the game production?
Bruce McAvaney: Ozisoft approached me about the idea through Channel Seven. In order to localise the game, they were tailoring it to each country - and so were using the anchors of television rights-holders to the Games from the USA, Britain and so on. I thought it was a great idea and when I saw how realistic it looked, I was quite in awe of the designers and those computer whizzes who think these things up...

PCPP: How long did it take to record all of the commentary?
BM: About a day.

PCPP: Was it difficult to get excited when you can't actually see what you're commentating on?
BM: For me - not difficult at all. I

read somewhere that I was expected to spontaneously combust should Cathy Freeman win the 400m. I do get excited by sporting events; and as I said before, this is pretty realistic. There's also the fact that I've been visualising these Olympics for the last three and a half years, so it's not hard to see them in my mind's eye.

PCPP: What do you think of the events chosen in the Sydney 2000 videogame?

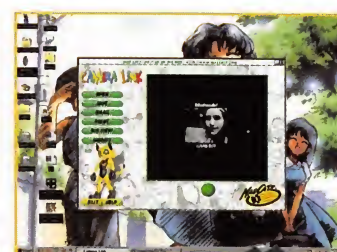
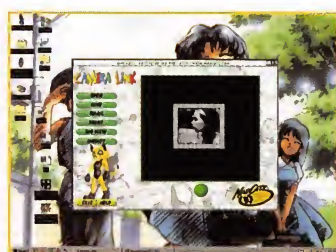
BM: I think they're a pretty good cross section, especially for this country. It would be impossible to fit in every sport. It's impossible to televise every sport, so unfortunately some have to miss out.

PCPP: Have you played the game yet? Do you play other games at all?



BM: No I haven't yet had the chance to play the game. To tell you the truth, I am pretty computer illiterate. I rely on my five year old son to show me how things work. I know I sound pretty boring, but at the moment my leisure time consists of walking the dog and wrestling the kids. Because I have got footy commitments before the Olympics, there's a fair amount of research to get through, so I am at my desk a lot. I would be lying if I said it was a terrible chore. I really enjoy just about every aspect of my job.

PCPP: Thanks Bruce, that was just "sensational"!



Mad Catz Camera Link

GAMEBOY CAMERA ACTION ON THE PC...
 DISTRIBUTOR: HES

■ Yeah, yeah. Big deal. A Gameboy Camera to PC link cable. Why on Earth would you? Well, for all you Gameboy camera and PC owners out there (and there are more than you might initially think, believe it or not), the Camera Link is a wonderful solution to the storage and transfer problems with the Gameboy Camera. Hook up the GB Camera, load up the software, and download the GBC images to your hearts content. You can be sure that your PC will allow plenty more than the GBC's 30-image limit. And saved as PC files, your GBC images can be sent around the net with the greatest of ease. Wonderful!



Music 2000

GIVE THE POPSTARS A RUN FOR THEIR MONEY WITH THIS D.I.Y. MUSIC PROGRAM

PUBLISHER: Jester

DEVELOPER: Codemasters

DISTRIBUTOR: Ozisoft

■ We here at PowerPlay have in the past seen a good range of music programs for the home PC. We've seen both the tacky and the decent. We've seen packages aimed at music production experts and people who really dig their electronic groove and want to start experimenting on their own. However, for those in between, there hasn't been much of a choice. Many of the quick start music programs can be more than a little intimidating to anyone who's not in some way music literate, or they can be simple for the experienced. Music 2000 almost gets the mix right.

One of the coolest features of this baby is how easy it is to start making music. Even if you've never even seen an instrument or a sheet of music before, you should find Music 2000 easy to use. The program is fitted out in large format cells, with 24 channels. You can fool around with reverb and beat (cranking it up to 999bpm is a good laugh) until you get just the sound that you're after. All audio and visuals are laid down in graphic blocks with icons indicating what it is, and how many tracks you're using to play it.



Choosing the right sound is a simple point and click affair, with relevant titles to the different options and a "try before you buy" demo option to give you instant playback of the desired sound or vision. Put it all together and you've got a simple, fun and easy to use program that will have the creative juices flowing in no time.

Better yet, the sounds in this package are of a pretty good quality. There's a large variety of beats, bass, riffs and melodies - even some vocals have been thrown in for good measure. Although the sounds are pre-set, you can alter the midi settings with a few easy clicks. The sounds are mainly pop/techno orientated, which is good. Trying to get a

decent string sound out of any synthesizer is hard enough as it is, so it's good to see there are developers out there who know what limitations they have for a home studio program and haven't included the "wounded-cyber-cat" range of noises.

Now if all this sounds like fun, but you'd like to be a little more hands on in the creative process, look no further than the Jam Session option. Here you can use the keyboard like a keyboard on a piano - create your own tunes, with your own sounds, with your own two hands. Music 2000 gets it just right - easy to use, easy to follow, easy to fool around - and it sounds pretty damn good.

Agata Budinska

CD



Asian Dub Foundation

COMMUNITY MUSIC
LONDON RECORDS

Eclectic is perhaps the best term to describe the free-wheeling sonic spirit of the UK's Asian Dub Foundation. Fusing drum 'n' bass, techno and rock 'n' roll, underscored by big beats and the odd sitar sample, this is music with an anarchic energy that is matched only by its political intent. Community Music will make you think and make you want to set fire to something at the same time.



Mermaid Avenue II

BILLY BRAGG & WILCO

The high number of quality Woody Guthrie songs that resulted from the Mermaid Avenue project meant that an additional title was always likely. More of the regulars with Corey Harris and Natalie Merchant. This is pure, personal and glorious folk music.



Sonic Youth

NYC GHOSTS & FLOWERS
Geffen Records

We've lost count of how many albums these New Yorkers've released, and considering that they've been creating artful noise under the "youth" banner for nearly twenty years - they're not exactly spring chickens, either.

Nyc ghosts & flowers' collection doesn't contain the types of song you can whistle on the bus. Instead, the recording offers an exciting post-rock journey, meandering from beat rhymes to subtle, all-out anthems.

Are sonic youth still punk? Absolutely, if not a little more introspective and, well, aged.



A guide to knob-twiddling in Music 2000

1. See just how well your clip images are working with each other as you work.
2. One right-click of the mouse brings up the options and sound/clip library.
3. Preview sounds and scenes before you lay them down.
4. Toggle between your song, the slip, or the jam session. Also access previously saved work.
5. Keep track of what you're laying down, and how long it'll last.



URL

Entertainment Weekly

www.ew.com

■ Entertainment Weekly is pretty much the only place to go if you want to keep a close eye on the world of entertainment media. Absolutely everything is here, from who is the biggest star in Hollywood, the highest selling album, down through to the occasional mention of gaming and even the odd comic review. It's pretty light on the actual entertainment but if you like your info fluffy and pretty then you could do worse than come and hang out here.

World Wrestling Federation

www.wwf.com

■ Wrestling. Go on, admit it, you love it. You love watching sweaty men touch each other grunting. Well, if you do, you should certainly come on in and check out the brilliant World Wrestling Federation's website. With millions of hits per month, you can be pretty much assured that biographies, news, commentary, photographs, videos and sound bites will be worthwhile. Even if you are not a wrestling fan you should really just come here and see how major marketing can be achieved online.

Olympics

www.olympics.com

■ OK. By the time you read this, it should be on. Happy now? Huh!? God, you people make me sick. "The Olympics will be wonderful! they'll be happy and gay!" Did you say that? Well, they should have been except PCPP's hometown of Sydney has been gouged and poked for it. So come to this website, check out the history of the Olympics in all its glory, see all the cool pics of people going fast and lifting heavy things and chucking things at other things. Then write in and complain to us about how we have no patriotic spirit. Mind you, it's a nice site.

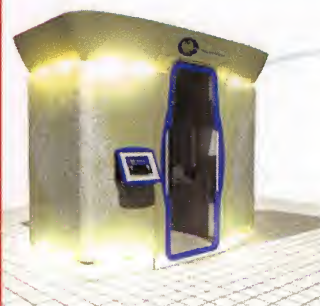
No, I am the Avatar

TAKING VIRTUAL REALITY IN A NEW DIRECTION

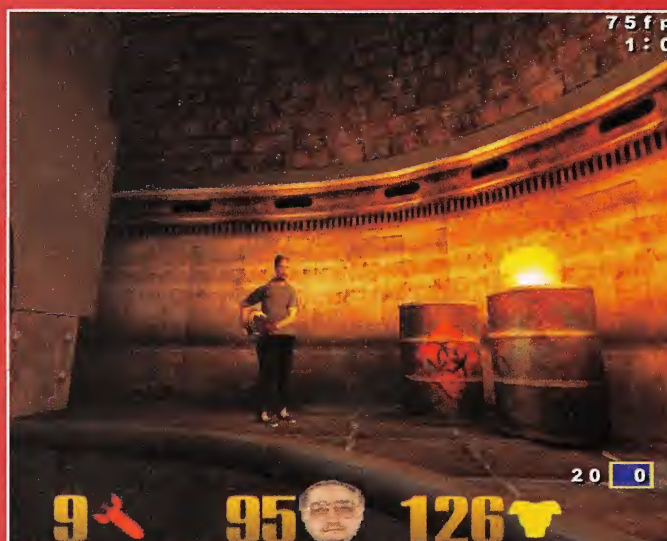
■ Firstperson games are, by their nature, the most immersive games around. The point-of-view they offer brings the player as close to the action as possible without actually zapping them through the monitor. Well, maybe that's just about to happen.

British company AvatarMe recently demonstrated its eponymous technology that allows players to create full-body photo-realistic characters models. The simple process (visit <http://www.avatar-me.com/> for more information) will have players playing games such as Quake 3 as themselves, so long as everyone on the server has their particular model stored locally. Quake 3 is the first game they've chosen to support, but versions for Half-Life and The Sims are also in production.

populating the web



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Images courtesy of www.barrysworld.com



Vote 1 PC PowerPlay!

PC

THE COMPUTER HALL OF FAME IS ACCEPTING NOMINATIONS

■ Ask yourself this: who has made the most important contribution to the development of the computer industry? If you think you have a suggestion, then point your browser to www.computer-museum.org and follow the link to cast your vote. The Computer Museum of America, part of Coleman College, San Diego, is currently accepting nominations for its Class of 2000. They've come up with a list of eighty candidates already, with the five winners being inducted into the Hall of Fame once the voting closes in September. But you don't have to choose someone on their shortlist, so go on, put down PCPP - we think we deserve it.

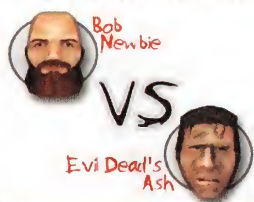
Sims Deathmatch

THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS TO NEWBIES

www.7deadlysims.com



Sims
DEATHMATCH



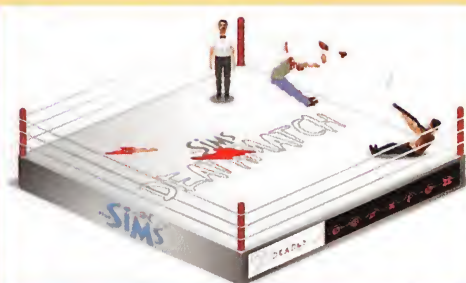
1. Bob vs Ash? Looks like it could be a close fight...



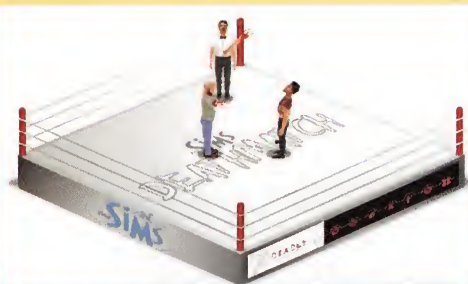
4. Bob gets Ash pinned down in the corner...



2. The referee asks the fighters to shake hands...



5. But Ash has a secret weapon!



3. Oh well, it's all 'armless fun' really...



6. Bye-bye Bob. Now, where's Mortimer...?



WE WANT HALO!

TELL BUNGIE WHAT YOU THINK OF THE X-BOX

■ If you've read our news story on p9 (and if not, what kind of fool are you to read a magazine back to front?), then no doubt you're feeling pretty fired up about the decreasing likelihood of the incredible-looking Halo ever making its way onto the PC. Fear not, because a group of optimistic souls at the Game-Over website have launched a petition to save Halo. At the time of print, the petition had registered more than 20,000 signees - including us. We would advise you to do the same at www.game-over.net/halo. Hey, it's either that or the magazine becomes X-Box PowerPlay, which frankly sounds rather silly...



TONY

the Reviewing Monkey in
E3 Forever

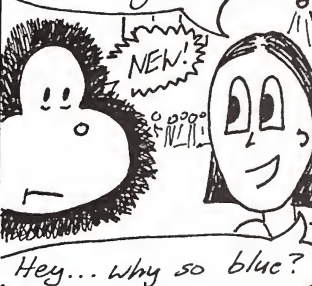
© J. DEWITT 2002



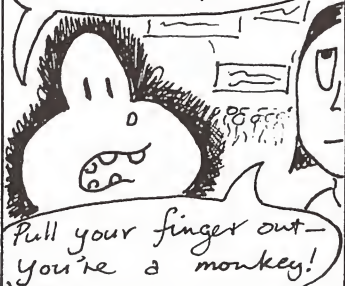
(Hands off the monkey, you filthy no-talent pirates!)

Tony & Gummy Sue make an appearance at E3!!

Word up Tony! This is so great...



I dunno... maybe it's the struggle that humanity must face against all of this rampant, heartless capitalism



You're right - it's just that we can't get into any of the exclusive meetings



To see John Romero, you need some SERIOUS hair care products...



Next month in
PCPowerPlay

THE ULTIMATE PC

WE REVIEW ALL THE
ESSENTIAL HARDWARE NEEDED
TO CREATE THE GAMER'S BEAST MACHINE

• Videocards

• Soundcards

• Motherboards

• CPUs

• Monitors

• Keyboards

• Speakers

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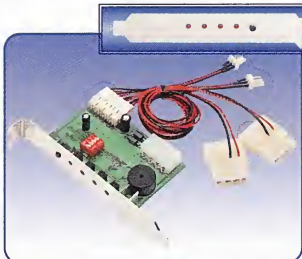
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FC-900L

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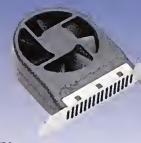
ST-900

- Mainboard cooling kit fit into a 3.5" bay



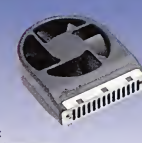
FC-500PS

- FC-500 With Installation adaptor.
- Fits for print port and slot.



FC-100

- Dimension: 120 × 90 × 27mm
- Airflow: 32 CFM
- Voltage: 12V
- System cooler for Pentium II & A.G.P. Card



FC-200

- Dimension: 108 × 90 × 27mm
- Airflow: 32 CFM
- Voltage: 12V
- System cooler for server, raid, Industrial computer (on SCSI port)

TT-900 Twin Turbo: FEATURE & BENEFITS

- Dual 9CM Fans / 80CFM
- Fits any 5.25" Bay
- High Performance and Low noise
- Easy Installation



Monitor Cooler



MC-100

NoteBook Cooler

The PCMCIA external cooling kit



NB-100

HDD Cooler

5.25" Bay



3.5" Bay



CPU Cooler / Second Fan



P-02SII
For SECCII & Pentium III



P-03A for Pentium II & Athlon/K7



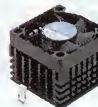
P-200
for Pentium & K6



P-22SII (Dual Fans)
For SECCII & Pentium III



P-22A (Dual Fans)
For Pentium II & Athlon/K7



P-500
For Socket 7, Socket 370 300Mhz and up



P-32SII (Three Fans)
For SECCII & Pentium III



P-05A (Three Fans)
For Pentium II & Athlon/K7



P-600 (6cm Fan)
For Socket 7, Socket 370 500Mhz and up



P-02C
For celeron



P-22C (Dual Fans)
For celeron



CH-410
For AGP Gard, Voodoo Card.



CH-420
For AGP Gard, Voodoo Card.



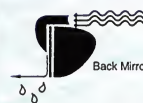
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SF-800 (80 × 80 × 25mm)
SF-801(3 wire) (80 × 80 × 25mm)
SF-900 (92 × 92 × 25mm)



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